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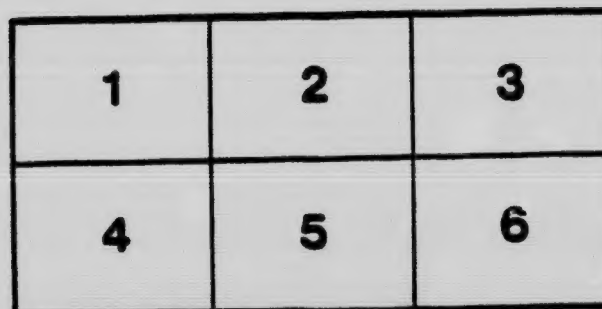
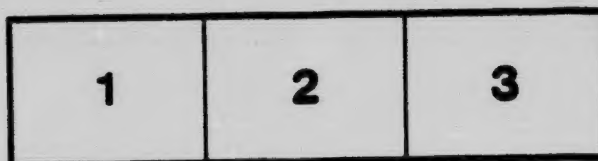
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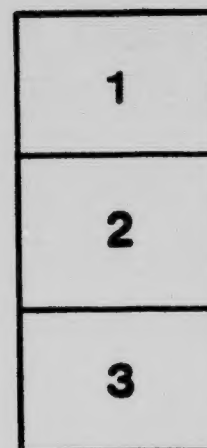
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Charles



**THE
ROMANCE OF THE
HOUSE OF ARNOLD**

**OR
RAVENDALE MANOR**

**BY
CHARLES SPARROW**

■

**TORONTO :
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THE ROMANCE OF THE HOUSE OF ARNOLD

OR
RAVENDALE MANOR

CHAPTER I.

AVONHURST HALL, built in the days of "good Queen Bess," quaint in architecture and with stately turret towers, can be seen for many a mile towering above Carlton Wood which surrounds its north side. Situated upon a hill, with the wood in the background, a charming lake lies on the east and greatly augments the beauty of the prospect. Many an artist has portrayed this scene. A mile off, the village of Avonhurst, with its one picturesque and irregular street, adds its proper complement to this baronial domain.

In the early years of the nineteenth century this magnificent property was owned by Squire Hobbs. Up to the time this story opens no one in the village had remembered the Hall without a Hobbs living

there. When the last of the male issue of Hobbs died Squire George Hobbs being only blessed with daughters—to be precise there were five of them—it was decided, for family reasons, to put the property on the market, the proceeds to be equally divided between them. But at that time buyers of landed estates were few, and for nearly a year the Hall was closed and desolate. Then one day the village of Avonhurst awoke to the startling news that some rich man had purchased the Hall. The glad tidings that a new squire was to take possession of the long-deserted Avonhurst estate was greeted joyously by the inhabitants. The news was learnt in the first place from the landlord of the village inn.

The White Horse, as the tavern was called, is situated at the extreme end of the village. A low, straggling building, it was quaintly picturesque, with its timbered gables, and thatched roof. Its interior was full of those nooks and corners which are dear to the antiquary.

Frank Yale was its proud owner and landlord. Though short in stature, he was not lacking in physical strength, as many of his guests could testify. Frank wanted no "chucker-out." When a man became too uproarious he could attend to him himself. His face was fat and chubby. His eyes, blue in colour, wore a pleasant expression that spoke of an easy, if not a happy-go-lucky, disposition. A marked contrast in looks and disposition was the man

he was serving with a glass of beer, when the reader first makes his acquaintance. It was Dick Nichol, cowman to the chief magnate of the county, Lord Cecil Arnold of Ravendale Manor, situated not far from Avonhurst, and one of the richest men in the neighborhood. Dick was Yale's first customer since he had learnt the news that the old Hall was to be tenanted, news which soon flooded the whole village with excitement.

Dick Nichol was a great contrast to the jolly landlord. His face was thin, with large cheek-bones showing very conspicuously above his hollow cheeks. But he was one of those wiry men who could stand all kinds of knocking about, deceptive to the eye, for he looked weakly.

The landlord swept the beer stains off the bar counter with a cloth, as he handed Nichol a glass of ale, greeting him with the "top of the morning," at the same time filling a glass for himself.

"'Tis to our new Squire," said Yale, with a smile, holding the beer high in the air.

"Right you are, Yale," said the cowman, "Squire of Avonhurst! My wife this morning told me how she had heard from the milkman that a new gent arrived yesterday. And a fine daughter he has, too, she says."

Yale's mouth drooped slightly. He was not the first to have the glad news, then. This was a disappointment, for he loved dearly to be the first to tell things.

"Is that all you heard, Nichol? Well, you did not hear much," he said, responding to Nichol's head shake. "What would you say if you knew this 'ere squire has been a bookmaker?"

"Won't believe it."

"Ah! I thought as much," he grinned; "'tis true though, so help me!"

"The d——, landlord; ye don't mean to say so!"

"It's a fact, Nichol, as true as you are what you are and I am what I am. Faber, 'tis his name, begging his pardon, Squire Faber—we must give him that honour now—was a partner in the big bookmaker firm of Rowerton and Company, of Liverpool."

Nichol greedily swallowed the beer down with one gulp. He dearly relished the well-tapped beer of the White Horse; there was none better in the kingdom, he was ready to swear to that. Smacking his lips together, he handed back the empty glass.

"That's what I calls news," he said, "and bad news at that," he added, filling his clay pipe. "Come, fill up. Another for yourself, too, landlord. We must certainly have another on the strength of it."

"Talk about sport, we will have our cup full now, aye, Nichol," the landlord remarked, screwing his eyes up into a grin.

"Sure me, sure me," said Nichol. "You hit the nail on the head there I reckon," he added, after drinking down the beer. "That's what the late

Squire lacked. Begging his pardon though, for I mean no disrespect to the dead. Still, it was so—Hobbs was no sport. His ideas were away different to Lord Cecil Arnold's. For an example"—he gave his dog that lay by his feet a poke in the ribs—"what my shepherd dog is to your skye terrier. Isn't that so, landlord?"

Yale nodded his head for an answer, refilling the glasses with beer.

"Master loves a horse. Did Squire Hobbs care for them?" Nichol said, with his eyes fixed on the beer the landlord was draining.

"You are right, Nichol. Come, we will have another drink."

"Sure. To the new Squire and 'is daughter," he toasted. "That's the stuff to drink our new Squire's health in, landlord," he added, with a broad grin.

There was a sound of rolling wheels outside. Somebody was driving by. Nichol hobbled to the window. "Quick, landlord," he cried. "'Tis the new Squire and his daughter driving by. What a bonny lass! My, what a smart livery!" he exclaimed. "Talk about style, aye, landlord?"

"Tush!" exclaimed Yale, disgustedly. "Too much swagger for a late bookie. Ah! they are all the same, Nichol, these newly-made millionaires. 'Tis not a natural look like our old-fashioned squires wear. God bless them, the old squires of our land!"

he added. "But for all that I 'old no disrespect to the self-made man. Still, it's true, Nichol, and there's no getting away from it, blood makes the gentleman, not money!"

"Like 'osses, landlord. A thoroughbred to a hack!"

"Yes. Blood always tells, always will! Talking about horses," he added, "that reminds me that Miltiades is a good thing for the Chester Cup."

"Lord Arnold's mare?"

"Sure."

"Who told you, landlord?"

"Mr. Lovejoy."

"Lord Arnold's agent told you?"

"Yes. He said his lordship, connections, and stables will win come a little over twenty thousand pounds should the coup come off."

"My!" Nichol's withered face lit up with a smile as he spoke. "I hope he'll win. He deserves it, Arnold does."

"Sure. Avonhurst will be delighted. Now I think on it, he's had a great run of luck lately, Nichol."

"Should say so. Ah! you have no need to complain, landlord. Aye," he added, with a knowing wink. "I don't deny that you 'ave paid out lots of money, but you 'ave taken in more, so help me!"

The landlord shrugged his shoulders, as if to ignore Nichol's accusation.

"It's a funny thing, Nichol," he said, filling up the empty glasses and handing one to him, "that our new Squire should once have been in the firm Lord Arnold does his business with."

"I suppose Lovejoy told you?" Nichol said, drinking the ale.

"Yes. Keep it quiet, Nichol. Just between you and me. I would not like it to be talked about, you know."

"Come, landlord, you should know Nichol by now. Can't I keep a secret?"

"Sure, when it's in the horse line." Yale laughed.

"That's me, landlord. I see what made him buy this estate. He wanted to be Arnold's neighbor. He's a bonny daughter to mate with master's son, aye, aye, landlord," Nichol laughed loudly.

"Nay, I did not look upon it in that light. There's reason in what you say, though. I won't contradict thee. May be so! There are a lot of estates in the market, he might have chose another. It's a sorry thing to my mind that the old squires' coffers do get run down so that they have to sell their old ancestral livings. It's the world going ahead too fast, they try to keep up with the fashion without having sufficient means, that's their finish. I say, have the landed gentry enough means to live stylish, as the fashion of to-day sets 'em to do, like our newly-made cousins from across the pond can? No! They try, then what with the heavy mortgages they hold, and all that, they dig their own grave."

"There's something in that, landlord, too," exclaimed Nichol, thrusting his hand into his trousers pocket. He pulled out a piece of paper, handing it to Yale. "I must be off to work. Here's the half-crown."

"All right, Nichol," the landlord said, glancing at the paper. Nichol had written the name of a race-horse he intended to back with the money. "It's a win," he said, as the landlord unlocked a cash-box he kept for that purpose, and slipped the money and the paper into it.

Our worthy landlord of the White Horse Inn was one out of many that "broke the law" by keeping books on horse-racing. He made a very good business financially in its little way—I say in its little way—for the stakes were not high ones placed with him, most of them coming from the working class, in amounts from one shilling to five. The gambling aristocrats dealt with Liverpool, London, or Ostend bookmakers.

CHAPTER II.

IT is desirable for the purposes of this story that something shall be said of the new owner of Avonhurst Hall and of his lovely daughter, respecting whom the landlord of the White Horse and his customer, Dick Nichol, had expressed themselves so freely.

Ronald Faber, the man in question, was originally the son of the managing clerk of one of the most prominent legal firms in Liverpool. His father hoped that the boy would follow in his own footsteps, and eventually occupy some such position as he himself filled. Accordingly, he sent him to a good school, where young Ronald soon showed that he had an unusual capacity for figures. He rose with very little difficulty to the top of his classes in arithmetic, and even made good progress in logarithms and algebra. His success naturally pleased his parents, and when he was fourteen years old they suggested that he should be moved to a superior school, with a view to his preparation for the university. The youth, however, had ideas of his own.

"Look here, dad," he said one day, "I'm very much obliged to you for wishing me to be highly

educated and all that, but where's the use? If I went to college you would have to support me for years, and you can't afford it. Besides, you have other children besides me."

"Well, what do you want to do, my boy?"

"I want to go to business."

The parents were somewhat disconcerted by the precocious attitude of their son, and they had many a talk with him on the subject. Ultimately the father said:

"Ronald, the midsummer holidays are approaching, and they will last two months. If you like to try to get yourself a situation I will not stand in your way. You will then be able to try how you like business instead of school."

So when the holidays came the young schoolboy approached one of the railway companies, having noted that a boy was wanted in their ticket office in a central part of the city. Here, his good manners and his cleverness at figures soon established him in the good opinion of his superiors. He seemed naturally and without effort to grasp all the complexities of the railway system. He had a fair knowledge of the geography of the British Isles, and his memory was phenomenal. Before the holidays were over he had not only made himself a very useful addition to the office staff, but had obtained a raise of salary. There was, therefore, no question as to what his immediate future was to be.

Young Faber went on as he had begun, and made the best of his opportunities. He became acquainted with some of the members of important mercantile firms, and the knowledge he had acquired of railway and shipping matters was very useful to him when, at the age of nineteen, he was offered and accepted a good position in the office of a wealthy firm of Liverpool merchants. By the time he was twenty-five years old he had risen to a managing position with a large salary. He was soon able to make one or two good investments in house property, besides having a respectable balance at his bankers.

It was soon after this that he first made acquaintance with the turf.

One of the partners was a sporting man, who became infatuated with the idea that it was possible to devise a system whereby a clever man might outwit the bookmakers and make a fortune.

He was not the first by any means to have had such a notion.

Knowing the cleverness in mathematical problems possessed by young Faber he took the office manager into his confidence. He invited the young man to dinner at his palatial residence.

What ambitious junior would not have been rather dazzled by such politic condescension? Mr. Delaunay—that was the name of the sporting employer—understood human nature.

He unfolded his scheme in his luxurious smoking-

room, and placed a box of very expensive cigars on the table. Ronald took a cigar, but he refused liquors. He said he had tried them, and found they did not conduce to his clearness of brain. Not till years afterwards would he touch a glass of spirits.

He listened to his employer, and took copious notes of what he said. He told Mr. Delaunay that he could not give an opinion off-hand; that he knew nothing of racing, but that he would study the matter and give him the result of his observations.

Shortly after this, Ronald Faber attended his first race meeting. He became interested in the new scene to which he was thus introduced. Mr. Delaunay made him acquainted with several prominent people on the turf. Among these was a very prominent and trusted bookmaker, who did business with some of the most distinguished patrons. This man's name was Rowerton, and he was destined to have an important influence on Faber's future career.

Rowerton was a jolly-looking man, with the appearance of a country farmer. His word was his bond. The members of the Jockey Club respected him.

He was at once taken with young Faber. He was a shrewd judge of character, and he was thoroughly surprised at the knowledge the young man had already obtained not only of horses, but of the chances of the turf. Faber was a lightning calculator, and he regarded the turf on its mathematical side. And though, after three months of a racing

season, he felt obliged to tell Mr. Delaunay that his so-called system had several weak points in it, he was able to be of considerable use to his employer in the way of advice as to placing his bets, and especially with regard to judicious hedging when anything doubtful was in the wind.

Faber might, therefore, be regarded, to some extent, at this period as a racing man, although up to this time his bets had been comparatively small. He regarded the turf from a scientific point of view, stuck to his duties in the office, and earned the good opinion of his firm.

It was at this point of his career that he fell in love, and became engaged. The object of his attachment—a Miss Laura Mostyn—was of good birth, the daughter of a deceased cavalry officer. The gallant captain had, however, been able to leave behind him only a slender pittance for his orphaned child, and she had adopted the uncertain position of a daily governess by way of eking out her small income. It was at Mr. Delaunay's house that Ronald Faber first met her. Casually seeing her to her lodgings led to her being asked to the house of his parents, where he still lived, and to a formal betrothal. The marriage was a happy one, but Faber's wedded happiness only lasted for a couple of years. His amiable wife died in giving birth to a daughter who, at her expressed wish, was named Constance. A sister of Faber's took her place as the housekeeper of the young man's beautifully-furnished home. But all

his delight in it had vanished. Not yet could he regard with any affection the baby who had been the cause of his wife's death. He was altogether knocked over by the sudden blow. He was now possessed of comfortable means, and by way of diverting his mind from its haunting sorrow he accepted a commission from his firm to visit some of their customers in the United States. On the ocean liner in which he embarked he was surprised to meet in the saloon on the first morning—it was November—the prominent bookmaker already mentioned, Mr. Rowerton, who with his son Richard was making his first voyage to America. Of this son we are destined to hear later.

"Dick's been a bit wild, you know," said Rowerton, when the young man had betaken himself to the smokeroom, "he ought to be at college—I sent him to Oxford, you know. But he's been going the pace instead of studying, and got sent down—rusticated they call it, I don't know why—seems the odds of rustic to me."

Faber expressed sympathy.

"Yes, he got into some row over a girl—don't know what it was. I know it cost me a pretty penny. But boys will be boys. Thought I'd take him with me to the States and look after him a bit till the affair had blown over."

The opportunities of a sea voyage for conversation are very numerous, and Rowerton and Faber had many talks about racing. Before they arrived in

New York these confabs had culminated in an offer by Rowerton for Faber to join him in his business at a salary of £1,000 a year, with a prospect of partnership. Finally, Faber closed with it. He thought the excitement and novelty of racing would make it easier for him to bear his bereavement.

When the season opened, therefore, and Faber's commission to the United States had been successfully accomplished, he took leave of his firm. His employers expressed their deep regret and gave him £500 as a parting gift.

In two years Faber was a partner with Rowerton, and making very large profits for his firm. By the time his young daughter was eighteen he was a very wealthy man. His sister Ada had been a true mother to the girl, and her father had watched over her with growing paternal love and pride as she grew into beautiful maidenhood. When she was twelve he had placed her in an expensive school at Brighton, and she had completed her education at Paris and Dresden. She was not only educated in the usual departments, but she had taken a course in domestic management and household science. It was at this time that Faber determined to retire from business and buy Avonhurst Hall. His sister Ada elected to go back to her parents' home and cheer their declining years. But his daughter Constance was now qualified, young as she was, to preside at her father's table and do the honours of their new establishment.

■

CHAPTER III.

RAVENDALE MANOR, the country seat of the Arnolds, unlike the stately Hall of Avonhurst, the neighboring estate, was a long two-storied building with three wings. An antique church stood near the Manor House, and not many yards away lay the Rectory. The beautiful green lawn in front of the Manor was artistically laid out with flower-beds, which abundantly testified to the skill of the Ravendale gardeners. In the middle a sculptured fountain sent forth its musical waters. A magnificent park lay at the back of the Manor House where roamed in large numbers the elegant fallow deer.

Lord Cecil Arnold owned the largest estate in the county and was the lord of the Manor. He was well past middle age, wore a long grey moustache of military fashion and looked every inch of him the country gentleman. His form was slightly bent with advancing age, but in his prime he had been square-shouldered and strongly set. His wife had died a few months after giving birth to a son, their only child.

It was close on twenty-one years since his son, Cecil, was born, and on this only child Lord Arnold lavished his affection and care. The boy did well

at Eton, and was sent in due course to Oxford. If he was not over studious he made a good average at his examinations, while in athletic sports he was a leader. Strange to say he had several times come into contact with young Rowerton, the scapegrace son of the bookmaker. But the circumstances were such that no love was lost between the two.

It is this handsome young man, Cecil, who lounges in the armchair in the smokeroom of Ravendale Manor on this November evening, about the end of the second year of Ronald Faber's life at Avonhurst. A cigar was between his finely-cut lips. His face wore a somewhat dejected expression. Outside, a miserable downpour of rain fell, beating insistently against the window. In a couple of days the Manchester November Handicap was to be run, and by appearance there seemed to be very little hope of it clearing. It seemed as if the weather had affected Cecil's usually buoyant spirits, but it really had to do with the complete change which this year had made in his life. Before the Fabers had come into the neighborhood Cecil had not known what love was. But it was inevitable that he should meet with Constance. In his ramblings on horseback during his Christmas vacation he had more than once met Miss Faber, accompanied by her groom, in the same pursuit, and he had fallen a victim to her charms. That was but the beginning of things. It seemed as if the two were fated to

meet, and it was not difficult for Cecil to find excuses for anything so pleasant. On the previous winter, which seemed so long ago, the lake in front of Avonhurst Hall had frozen into a perfect sheet of ice, and the new squire rendered himself very popular by throwing it open to the skaters in the neighborhood. The first time that Cecil and Constance met, after the few nights of severe frost, the subject of skating had come up, and Constance had confessed that she had had but little practice in the art. That Cecil should offer to give her lessons goes without saying.

Now if there is anything likely to awaken tender sentiments between two young people of ardent temperament such as Cecil and Constance were, there can be nothing more conducive to such an end than for the young man to offer to teach the girl to skate. It has a much more intoxicating effect than waltzing in a heated ballroom. The sharp frosty air gets into the blood, and the whole frame tingles with excitement. And although there might have been twenty or thirty skaters on the ice that fine wintry afternoon, the lake was of such extent that there was no crowding, and the spot where Cecil was giving Constance her first lesson was comparatively secluded. The girl looked her best in a neat costume of navy blue, trimmed with fur. A coquettish little fur toque crowned her rich auburn hair. Her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes sparkled with excitement.

Electricity was in the clear frosty atmosphere, and electric contact seemed to take place between the young people as they held hands and glided over the smooth surface. Sometimes it seemed to be quite necessary for Cecil to put his arm round the waist of Constance to keep her from falling. Sometimes, grasping each other's hands, they would involuntarily twirl around and make violent efforts to keep themselves from ignominiously coming down upon the ice. Constance, however, proved herself to be a quick learner, and as the darkness fell and they skated together to where a bonfire had been lighted on the side of the lake, she had acquired an easy poise that was rather wonderful considering that this was her first essay. The butler had come down from the Hall with hot coffee and refreshments. Squire Faber beamed upon his guests and neighbors. It need not be said that he was exceptionally genial to Cecil. Before he left, that young man had accepted an invitation to luncheon on the following day and the bright eyes of Constance had signalled to him that she would be exceedingly pleased to have a further lesson upon the ice.

Lord Arnold was not seriously displeased when his son told him that he was going to lunch at Avonhurst Hall. It might be that he would have been better pleased if Cecil had been attracted by one of the aristocratic beauties who had been assiduously paraded before him by match-making mammas and

aunts during the London season. Lord Arnold could not help recognizing that his son was an eligible *parti*. He was a fine boy, very manly and handsome, and he would inherit large wealth. At several fashionable assemblies which had been attended by father and son, Lord Arnold had contrasted him with other young men, and with parental pride had rejoiced that the comparison was very distinctly in favor of Cecil.

In that very miscellaneous assemblage, modern London society, there was a great variety of both sexes. In many instances wealth had bought its way in. For instance, there was the exquisitely-dressed Mr. Richard Rowerton, of whom mention has already been made. How in the world, thought Lord Arnold, did this young man manage to edge his way into such a supposedly exclusive circle? True, he was handsome, in a way. His tall, broad-shouldered figure evidently excited the admiration of many a woman. But there was something hard and cruel in his eye, and his countenance bore the marks of dissipation. True, again, he had been at Oxford, and had acquired the university ease of manner. But compared with Cecil, Lord Arnold thought he was nowhere.

"All right, Cecil," he said, waking up from a train of thought, "take care of yourself, my boy. Faber's daughter is an uncommonly attractive girl, eh?"

"She's a stunner; no nonsense about her," said his son, heartily.

Mr. Faber was highly pleased to welcome to his table the Honorable Cecil Ravendale, son and heir of Lord Arnold of Ravendale Manor. Squire Faber was not a vulgar man, and his elevation to the position he now occupied had come so gradually that he had been able to acquire much of the manner of the society in which he now moved. In former years his business had brought him into contact with many men of rank. Moreover, he was a man of exceptional capacity, and he had read widely and intelligently.

It happened that at this time he had staying with him at Avonhurst his aged father and mother, and his sister Ada, who had formerly been his housekeeper. He had no need to be ashamed of his relatives, and as a matter of fact he was very proud of them. He did not forget that to his parents he owed his education, his start in life, and the influence of a good example. It is true that Mr. Faber, sen., had been very much distressed when his son left the orthodox paths of legitimate commerce for what seemed to him the precarious and not too respectable avocation of a bookmaker. But his son had carried into his new profession the strict business principles in which he had been nurtured, and it was his probity, retained under all circumstances, as well as his exceeding ability, which had laid the foundation of his success. His father was very glad when his son was able to retire from that business and to confine

his financial operations to the development of his large investments in other directions. And it may be said that this visit of the old folk to their son's "new place" filled them with pardonable gratification. The handsome white-haired old gentleman and the venerable and natty old lady, who now took their places at their son's table did him no discredit. As to Miss Faber, Constance had always adored her Aunt Ada.

Cecil saw the girl who was the object of his admiration, therefore, under circumstances which greatly increased his respect for her. Her affectionate demeanour to her grandparents was natural and unforced, and her conversation had a simple gaiety and unconscious frankness that were very charming. The young man came away after that second skating lesson feeling that she was the one girl for him. But although she was most agreeable in her manner she still retained a sort of maidenly independence. He looked in vain for any sign that she cared for him in the same ardent way in which he cared for her. And although he saw her again and again during this vacation, he went back to Oxford feeling that he still had to endure that state of uncertainty which is calculated to make a young man occasionally give way to fits of melancholy.

When he came home for the "Long" vacation in the summer he found that Constance and her father had gone off for an extended Mediterranean trip.

They were to visit Italy and Egypt, and were not expected home until the winter. But worst of all was the bitter intelligence that they were the guests, on this voyage, of that elderly millionaire, Mr. Rowerton, who had invited his former partner, his daughter and his sister Ada to accompany him on his newly-acquired steam yacht. And the excessive bitterness of the matter lay in the fact that Mr. Richard Rowerton, the exquisite habitué of London drawing-rooms, the owner of a racehorse or two, the admired of many women, was one of the party. Cecil gnashed his teeth with rage. Why should that unconscionable blackguard have such an innings?

Cecil did not give a thought to what his father might think of a son of his paying his addresses to the daughter of Squire Faber. Young men with Cecil's natural independence of feeling do not, as a rule, consider what their fathers may say—witness the number of variety actresses who have married the sons of noblemen and have often made them very good wives.

Neither did he give much thought to the Manchester November Handicap, which was to be run on the following day. What was chiefly bothering him was that on this November afternoon Richard Rowerton was a favored guest at Avonhurst Hall. That same morning he had seen Constance Faber walking with him in the grounds, and had gathered from their demeanour that their acquaintance had

grown to some degree of intimacy. He could not help feeling that he had lost ground. On the occasions on which he had seen Constance since he had come home three weeks ago the conditions had not been favourable and he had striven in vain for the renewal of the camaraderie of the previous winter.

Cecil rose and flung the end of his cigar into the fire. He had made up his mind. He would end this state of uncertainty once for all.

He stood with his back to the fire, listening. There was somebody coming.

The door opened and his father stepped in.

Lord Arnold's face spoke of good health and that happy condition when all the world seems at its brightest. A sad contrast was the dejected look his son wore. Cecil's cheeks had slightly fallen in, his eyes possessed an unnatural brilliance. His usually rosy complexion was pale.

Arnold had noticed the change in his son's disposition for many a day. But now the great race was so near his condition was more strikingly brought before him. It seemed unnatural for his son to be so gloomy, so reserved on such an occasion. That his son was as keen a sport as he was he knew well. In a short time they would see the biggest coup of their lives come successfully off. Should he not be in good spirits? For Lord Arnold and his son, his friends and his stables stood to win the neat sum of about sixty thousand pounds.

Lord Arnold touched the bell then seated himself at a small table that held tobacco jars, pipes and cigars.

The butler immediately came in answer to the ring. Lord Arnold ordered champagne to be brought.

After he had given the order he turned to his son.

"Come" he said, pointing to a chair close to him. "You are not feeling well, lad? A glass of champagne will do you good," he said, kindly.

Cecil clinked his glass with his father's, and drank heartily the champagne the butler had placed before him.

"Have you any doubt of Queen not winning the race, Cecil? If that is on your mind, I think you can safely banish it," said his father, handing him a cigar.

Cecil winced.

"Glory Boy fancied, dad," he answered, rolling the leaf of his cigar as he spoke. He knew not whether it was true, but he saw it had taken with his father, and felt relieved.

"Yes. Lord Dunsmore thinks he has a chance. It is a very poor one in my estimation. Old Jarvis has Queen in fine shape. Then, lad, the heavy-going is all in favour of the mare. The race is as good as over," laughed Arnold.

Still, Arnold's laugh was not a happy one. Cecil's gloom had affected his spirits.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was a great stir in the little village of Avonhurst on the eve of the Handicap day. All classes of men after closing hours were seen hurrying through the muddy street towards the White Horse Inn. There, in the cosy bar-room, objectionable to refined people because of the smell of stale tobacco smoke and spilt beer, were already seated men of all shades of life around the large open grate, where a bright fire glowed and illumined the different features that gazed into it. Drinks had been freely given round, a treat from the landlord, as was his wont on the eve of the Manchester November Handicap, and the hubbub of voices ceased as he hobbled around, taking in bets, from shillings to pounds, mostly laid on Queen, the popular horse for the Handicap. He pocketed the money and slips of paper, and refilled the empty glasses with beer. "Drink hearty, gentlemen," he said, holding a pint of well-tapped beer to his mouth.

A stranger who sat in the corner of the room, and who on account of his silence during the general conversation had caused the landlord to feel somewhat uneasy, suddenly broke the silence.

"I'll tell ye what," he blurted out, "you will have a little surprise when the Handicap has been run. You'll regret you put your money on Queen. It's throwing it away, I tell you."

"Who the d—— are you?" demanded Dick Nichol, angrily, turning round to look at the speaker.

"I am Bob Fletcher, from Newmarket, and I knows what I says."

"The d—— you are. You knows wrong, then, I says," said Nichol with some wrath, feeling the effect of the beer he had so deeply indulged in.

The stranger frowned. He felt a little insulted.

"Well, I'm not a man for flatly contradicting anyone," he said, "you have your views on the race; I have mine. But," he added, mildly, "I thought I was doing a favour to tell these gentlemen here present that they were on the wrong track, for I knows a horse that'll beat Queen."

"No, you don't," growled Nichol, angrily. No horse, he thought, could beat his master's, and it was an insult for anyone to think so. "Queen," the favourite: the hope of Avonhurst!

The landlord looked uneasily around.

"Come, come, Nichol," he said with an air of authority, "let this 'ere stranger have his say out. I for one would like to hear his views on the race."

Dick Nichol looked sulkily around at the crowd.

"Perhaps you may influence some here to alter their bets," he said, with bitter sarcasm, "but not

me. What I 'ave betted on I'll stick to. That's Dick Nichol."

"No," said the stranger, "I don't want anyone to alter their opinion. And I won't quarrel with no man."

"Spoken like a man," exclaimed the landlord, smilingly. He felt happy that the stranger was not a fighting man and had taken Dick's attack so coolly. "There's always lots of different opinions in racing, gentlemen. Some 'ave 'pinions of one horse to win, some another. But, stranger, we would like to hear yours."

"Well!" exclaimed the stranger, slowly refilling his pipe, while a knowing look shone in his wizen face, "as some of ye would like to know, I 'ave a mind to tell you and nobody would be going far wrong to hedge their money on't. That's me."

"To be sure we would like to know," said Jim Wheelbox who was one of the Ravendale estate drainers. "Are we not all good friends here? Not saying that Dick isn't right that Queen will win in 'is opinion, nor your tip, stranger, will win in your opinion. Then, if mine was asked I should say Queen, but maybe a little hedging on yours, stranger, would not be amiss. What is it, stranger?"

The stranger gave a few vigorous puffs at his pipe. His little ferret-like eyes twinkled.

"There's no call to lay any bets on what I know,

if you don't have the mind. Sure I don't want to turn any man."

"Very sensibly spoken," said the landlord "for there are folks, in my opinion, would turn through any little argument. It does not take much gab to influence some people. But that's not me."

"If folks are fools, landlord, that's no business of mine. But I'm not against them turning if they 'ave a mind. My tip's from the right quarter, anyway."

He rose and stood with his back to the stove, looking down at the many faces that were anxiously turned toward him.

"My son, gentlemen," he said, clearing his voice, "is an apprentice in Blewats' stables at Newmarket; and I tell you, now, they have a dark horse that will romp away from the field in the 'Andicap to-morrow."

"What 'orse? What 'orse, sir?" many eager voices asked only too eager to take his tip.

"Glory Boy!"

"Glory Boy!" screeched Nicol, amid a growl that appeared to end in a harsh laugh, "you mean to say an hundred to one chance can beat our Queen? I tell you, you are fooling. Why, man, alive, tell me something easy!"

While Dick indignantly demonstrated his feeling towards his view on the race, there was a general stir among the men sitting near him. Some rose. Eagerly

thrusting their hands into their trousers pockets, they pulled out some coins to lay on the horse. A hundred to one chance was worth the trying, anyhow. Suddenly a shrill voice echoed in the still muggy atmosphere outside, "Evening papers, evening papers." It echoed far and near.

The landlord rose and hastened to the door.

A dirty urchin, plastered up to the neck in mud, wet to the skin, darted up, thrusting out towards him his skinny hand that held the *Evening Mail*. As the landlord took it there was a grab for the paper. All eyes eagerly gazed at it and trembling hands turned over the pages until the restless eyes caught a glance at the page with the latest racing betting printed thereon. Nobody cared to notice the poor shivering child outside. The poor boy wistfully glanced towards the warm stove and the hungry racing men's faces. They saw him not, then with a sigh he pocketed the landlord's halfpenny, which he had held grasped in his little, cold hands, and darted out into the dark and dreary night.

The silence was broken at last by the landlord.

"Glory Boy is favourite," he gasped out, "five to one."

There was a low murmur of discontented voices, ending in a growl, reminding one of disappointed beasts seeing the prey they prized so dearly being devoured by their competitors. Amid the roar somebody loudly ordered "Beers all round." It was the

stranger. All eyes suddenly turned towards him who had adopted the rôle of prophet. He held his head high. A look of triumph gleamed in his eyes, which seemed to say, "I told you so." Tossing a half-crown towards the landlord to pay for the treat, he rose and, without a word, left the room.

CHAPTER V.

THE rain ceased at daybreak, and the rising sun drove the clouds and heavy mist away. Although it was November the foliage had lingered on wonderfully and it was decked in glittering brilliance. The green lawns, freshened by the moisture, looked greener, the flowers that remained—the last blossoms of summer—had a sweeter scent; even the birds sang with a blither note. Yet Constance Faber, while she strolled through the beautiful garden of Avonhurst, did not look entirely happy. Her lovely auburn hair strayed loosely around her hatless head, and shone a golden tint in the sparkling sunlight. She was the picture of loveliness. A slight smile hovered around her lips as she stooped towards a rosebush and picked what was almost the “last rose of summer,” and placed it in her bosom. If Cecil Arnold had seen her now he would have thought her even lovelier for the soft touch of gravity that was upon her face. But it was not Cecil’s footsteps that she now heard behind her. It was the self-sufficient Mr. Richard Rowerton, with a triumphant and yet an anxious expression upon his face, who came towards her.

"You have deserted us, Miss Faber. It is too bad of you to take away from us the light of your countenance," he said, lighting a cigarette.

"Indeed! Most people like a little solitude sometimes," she replied, lightly.

"I trust my company is not disagreeable to you, Miss Faber. You must confess that I have done my utmost to give you pleasure."

"I am sure I thank you sincerely for your great benevolence, Mr. Rowerton," she said, with a little sarcastic bow.

"Oh, hang it all, you shouldn't take a fellow up so short. Of course I know very well what you mean. You know perfectly well that I'm in love with you, and that you could twist me round your little finger. And yet you will not give me a word of encouragement."

"You go too far, Mr. Rowerton. What is your warrant for speaking to me like this? Of course I must acknowledge that you have been very attentive to my wishes, and that my father and I much enjoyed your father's hospitality on that splendid yachting tour. You confess that I have never given you a word of encouragement. I am glad you regard it in that light. I am not given to throwing myself at the head of every young man I happen to meet."

"Not even the Honorable Cecil Arnold's" replied Rowerton, vindictively.

An angry blush rose to the girl's cheek.

"You have no right to bring in that name or any other," she said.

"Still your tell-tale blushes show which way the wind blows," he replied, with cool mockery.

Richard Rowerton generally had himself well in command. Bowing very ceremoniously, he said, "I will take my leave of you, Miss Faber. Perhaps at some time in the future you will regret that you have made an enemy where you might have made a friend."

"What an absurd weathercock you are," replied Constance, with sparkling eyes; "I have no patience with a man who blows hot and cold in the space of a minute or two. By all means remove your presence, Mr. Rowerton, I'm sorry that your visit should terminate in such a way, but upon my word you are simply horrid."

And she turned her graceful back upon him petulantly.

As Rowerton proceeded towards the Hall, with the intention of telling his man to pack his things and get out his motor car, he was much annoyed to meet Cecil Arnold, who approached him with a manly stride and a face of some sternness. But Rowerton was not one to acknowledge defeat before a rival. Forcing a smile to his face he greeted Cecil with well-simulated cordiality.

"Well, Arnold, my dear fellow, I'm delighted to

see you. What in the world makes you look so glum? I want you to congratulate me, my dear boy. I've just been accepted by the very finest girl ever created. Miss Faber has at last said 'Yes,' and I am the happiest man alive."

Cecil Arnold's face was a study. Dislike, surprise, rage passed over it in turn. But he was a man, and he schooled himself. He was not going to let Rowerton see how his words rankled in his heart.

"Well, if that's so," he said at last, "I congratulate you, Rowerton. And there's my hand upon it," he said, magnanimously.

Rowerton grinned. He had a devil's pleasure in the angry jealousy that he knew Cecil Arnold was subduing.

"I suppose you will be at the race to-morrow?" said Cecil, with affected carelessness.

"Oh, yes, I shall be there. In fact, I'm going away now. I'm just going to tell my man to put my things together and get the motor out. Ta-ta, my dear boy," he said, as he passed along towards the Hall.

By the time Cecil arrived at the Italian garden, to which Constance had bent her steps he had himself well in hand. The girl should not see what he felt. His pride came to his assistance.

"Good morning, Miss Faber," he said, lifting his

hat. "It seems quite a time since I saw you, but I am glad to see that you look as well as ever."

"A truce to compliments," she replied, with a touch of weariness. Cecil thought he perceived a difference in her. She gave him her hand listlessly—there was none of her former cordiality in it. The maidenly modesty of the girl had been outraged, and she was at the moment determined to give no ground for any more masculine advances.

"Well, I shall probably not trouble you with any more for a long time. After the big race to-morrow, which I suppose I must attend on my father's account, I shall, I think, go abroad. I have long wished to do so, and now there is a chance. I am going with some of the Oxford fellows to South Africa. They seem to think there will be trouble with the Boers."

He could not understand the way in which she looked at him. Was she trying to play fast and loose with him, now that she had pledged her troth to another? A touch of hardness came into his voice as he said:

"After all there's nothing half so true as the comradeship of men one can trust. I was getting a bit soft and sentimental. Well, good-bye, Miss Faber, if I don't happen to see you again, and thank your father for his kind hospitality and your own. Don't forget the skating if the ice is good this winter," he concluded, with forced gaiety.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was not to be expected that Squire Faber would at once lose all interest in the racing world when he retired from the business with which he had formerly been connected. He had intended, on settling at Avonhurst to "drop racing altogether." How hard it was for Mr. Faber to keep away from it may be imagined. He was not a weak man, and under different circumstances his resolve might not have been shattered. Keep the thought, the excitement of racing, away, that holds one like a vice in its grip—how easy it seems, but how hard to accomplish! Even the atmosphere around, where he had expected to live free from it, breathed it. There in the garden he would overhear the gardeners discussing the racing prospects. In his club, it was the everlasting topic of conversation—would Lord Arnold's horse win the Handicap? So in the village. A great desire seized him to have one more plunge. Life had been those last few months dull to him. As he sat in one of the comfortable chairs of the club, considering the prospects of the great race that was so soon to be run, now listening to the remarks of the many men around discussing the problem, he felt gay. The old racing blood surged anew. Presently he was awaked from

his dreams by somebody touching him lightly on the shoulder. Lord Arnold stood before him.

Faber's eyes brightened as he recognized the owner of Ravendale Manor.

"Mr. Faber, I believe!" the old man said in a hearty voice. He had not had a previous introduction to the new Squire, but knew him by sight.

"Yes, sir."

"I am Lord Arnold."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, sir," said Faber, rising to take his outstretched hand.

"Mr. Faber, formerly connected with the Rower-ton of Liverpool, I believe."

"I am, my lord."

Lord Arnold drew a chair close up to him, sitting down he touched the bell on the table.

"Bring two specials, Bob, and a bottle of Perrier."

"Yes, my lord," said the page boy, bowing.

"You don't object to a Scotch, Mr. Faber?" he said. "I should have asked before ordering; believe me, it was a little thoughtless on my part. Excuse me."

"Pray don't apologise, my lord. Scotch is one of my favorite beverages."

"By a happy coincidence I hit right," laughed Lord Arnold, choosing a cigar from his silver case.

"I see you are smoking, Mr. Faber," he added.

"Yes, thanks, my lord!"

"By-the-by, Mr. Faber, how do you like your new

abode? Seems quiet I should imagine after the city, eh?"

"Decidedly quiet, my lord. But I am getting acclimatised to it. My daughter, Constance, loves the country. It does me good to see her look so happy. The country air is benefiting her to a marked degree."

"Ah, you are a lucky man, Mr. Faber, to possess such a charmingly handsome daughter," Lord Arnold exclaimed enthusiastically as he sipped his whiskey and Perrier.

Mr. Faber smiled. "Believe me, my lord, Constance is as good as she is lovely."

"I quite believe you, sir. Two very good assets. I hear she has a good name amongst the poor. Old Mother Wheelbox, one of my tenants, the other day spoke well of her to me, 'As good as gold Miss Faber is,' she said. She's a remarkable old woman, but has a wretch of a husband. Drinks badly and abuses her when in that state. Poor soul!"

"Very complimentary to Constance. But to be kind to the poor is a hobby of hers."

"A noble hobby," said Lord Arnold.

He turned and glanced towards the clock. It wanted a few minutes to ten.

"Excuse me, Mr. Faber, I ordered my carriage to be here. I'll see you at the race-meeting to-morrow, of course," he added rising.

"Sorry, my lord, I have an important engagement

to attend to." That was an excuse. Lord Arnold would be none the wiser he mused.

Lord Arnold looked surprised.

"Can it not be put off, Mr. Faber? You should not miss the great race."

"Hardly, hardly, my lord."

"What a pity. But I hope we will have the pleasure of seeing you and your daughter at the dance to-night?"

"We are intending to respond to your kind invitation. Constance will be delighted, I assure you."

As Lord Arnold turned to leave, Faber rose. "One minute, my lord," he whispered, "is Queen as good as she looks?"

"Queen and Ravendale dance to-night, Mr. Faber, a good double event," he answered smilingly.

Mr. Faber's eye brightened as he turned and touched the bell on the table to summon the page boy. His eyes wandered restlessly towards the door Lord Arnold had closed.

"Bring me a telegram-form, ink and pen, boy," he said to the page, who came in answer to his call.

"Yes, sir." He returned with the materials and placed them before Mr. Faber.

"That will do, boy," said Faber, dipping the pen into the ink. He quickly wrote out a telegram. Pulling out his watch, he immediately rose and hastened out of the club.

It was a large commission on Queen for the Handicap that he was going to wire to his late firm.

CHAPTER VII.

"MASTER left word that he had gone to town, Miss, and would be back for lunch."

It was the butler who spoke. Constance had just stepped into the hall. Her beautiful oval face wore a preoccupied expression. The smile that usually lingered around her beautiful curved lips had disappeared. For a moment she stood motionless.

"Thank you, John," she said, sinking into a chair.

Not a sound was heard in the great drawing-room, with the exception of the ticking of the marble clock on the mantelpiece. A loneliness such as she had never known before came over her. Presently she rose and, seating herself by the open piano, ran her fingers over the keys, and she broke tumultuously into Tosti's "Good-bye." Gradually her voice overcame its trembling. The song expressed the sentiments of her heart. There, quiet and unheard, she could pour forth her soul. But at the end of the song her feelings overcame her. She flung herself on to the sofa and gave way to an agony of tears.

But all signs of the crisis through which she had passed were smoothed away before the sound of horse's feet and the whirl of wheels up the carriage drive told her that her father had returned.

Constance rose when she heard her father's step approaching, and closed the piano. A smile was on her lips when he opened the drawing-room door and walked in.

"Darling!" he greeted her with. "I do hope you have not been lonesome! I must really apologize. You see, dear, I had an engagement in town which had quite slipped my memory until Robins announced the carriage at the door. You were nowhere to be found then. I gave instructions to the butler to tell you, so your mind would be at ease." He stooped to kiss his daughter. "There, you will forgive me," he added.

"Thank you, father. I was in the garden when you left. Robins told me as soon as I came in. You are cold, father?" she asked, drawing a chair close to the fire. "Although the sun shines bright, it always seems cold driving at this time of the year, I know."

"A trifle, a trifle, dear," he answered, sitting down. She drew a chair close to him.

"Father, dear," she said, sweetly, "tell me all the news?"

He fondly stroked her head and put his arm around her shoulders.

"Well, there's little to tell. I met Lord Arnold. He gave me a reminder of the dance to-night."

Mr. Faber paused for a moment.

"Is that all, father?" she enquired.

"Oh, no. The Rector, he was asking after you too. Oh, Constance, if you heard one-half of the kind words spoken about you, you ——"

"Father!" She interrupted him, placing the tips of her fingers in her ears. "I won't hear another word!"

"Child!" he laughed, "did you not entreat me to tell you the news!"

She only shook her head in answer.

"Come, love, the gong sounds. We'll go to lunch. Afterwards you must get a nap. For it will be the early hours of morning, I trow, before you yet another."

They rose, and arm in arm left the room.

"Bring a bottle of Mumm, Robins," said Mr. Faber, as he took his seat at the table. He thought his daughter looked pale, and that she would be better for a glass of wine.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE weather was all that could be wished for. So thought the great throng of people that were making their way to the race-course. The sky was a perfect blue. The sun seemed remarkably hot for the time of the year, and this had caused many women to bring out once more their summer dresses. Long before the start of the first race there was not a seat to be had in the enclosure. The grand-stand was crowded, and the course was thronged all around with all kinds and conditions of people. Lord Arnold was amongst the first to go into the paddock to inspect the horses. Soon Cecil followed him. Arnold had a hurried *tête-à-tête* with his trainer, then left and joined Lord Dunsmore in the enclosure. Everybody seemed to fall in love with Queen. Glory Boy was the next most-talked-about horse. Among the animal's friends were Lady Dunsmore and her boy of sixteen, talking to the trainer of their horse, Glory Boy. Jarvis, the trainer, noticing them, stalled Queen and joined them. In a few minutes he came back to the mare. As he went into the stall he met Cecil leaving it rather hurriedly. It was half an hour before the Handicap was scheduled to be run. Jarvis

called to his young master, but he did not appear to hear him, for he hurried to the grand-stand and joined his father.

Presently the Handicap field, eighteen horses, was ridden down to the starting post. Glory Boy, a little excited, playfully let out with his heels, nearly causing an accident, as his admirers pressed against him while he was being led out of the paddock. There was a scattering of women and frock-coated men. Much money was hedged on this well-trained animal, though Queen still held her own as favorite. Presently a great roar from the crowd thundered through the air. "They are off ! They are off !"

Lord Arnold with his son stood up in the stand to watch the race. He held a powerful field glass to his eye.

"Look !" he whispered to Cecil, "Queen leads. Hurrah !"

They left the starting post together, then Queen bounded to the front. But after a furlong or two Queen showed signs of distress. "Something is the matter with the mare," groaned Lord Arnold. His face turned pale.

"Good Heavens !" he cried in horrified amazement, "the mare's been doped."

Poor Queen ! It could be plainly seen that she struggled gamely against the drug that was draining her senses. Her quivering nostrils were dank with foam, her bloodshot straining eyes appeared to appeal

for mercy, as the jockey raised his whip in the air. He did not strike. Her roll, her body, soaked with sweat, told him the tale. In a few minutes the race was over. A cheer like the rumbling of thunder in the distance rolled along the surging crowd of people until it broke out in one deafening roar.

"Glory Boy wins ! Glory Boy wins ! Hurrah ! Hurrah !"

Lord Arnold stood for a time motionless. Then he turned to his son. A sob he could hardly restrain rose to his lips.

"Come, Cecil. We will go," he said in a hoarse voice.

Cecil rose, and, clasping his father's arm to give him support, they left the grand stand. The dense crowd of people gave way. A low murmur of discontented voices could be heard here and there, as they passed out into the street. Hailing a cab, they got in. "To Ravendale, sir?" asked the cabby, recognizing his fare.

"To the Grand Hotel."

The cabman closed the door. Mounting on the box, he drew the whip, giving the old horse an awakener. They rattled along the streets at a quick pace, leaving the race-track and the tumult of the crowd far behind. Cecil sat motionless. His stern white face looked like a graven image. Lord Arnold, who sat opposite him, for the first time noticed his son's altered appearance. His heart immediately

warmed to him. He knew Cecil had plunged, but he did not know the exact amount he had had on Queen, and lost.

"Come, Cecil," he said kindly, "do not take it too much to heart. The loss we have sustained to-day we will recoup. 'Tis the uncertainty of racing that makes the game the grander. We have heard the cheer of the crowd, but it will be in another tune should we live to see the Lincolnshire Spring Handicap run. Queen will show them how she could have romped again with the Handicap field, if some black-guard had not done that dastardly trick. But, my God!" Lord said, raising his voice, "whoever it was, I will find him out, and by Heaven I will make him suffer for it."

Lord Arnold's anger abated. When he spoke again it was in a milder tone. Dusk that was setting in hid his son's face from view, but his silence troubled his father.

"We will abide our time, Cecil. To-morrow I will investigate. I shall be confoundedly glad when we are out of this rickety cab," he said purposely to alter the subject. "Ah! there is the Grand Hotel." The driver had pulled up. Lord Arnold and Cecil stepped out.

"We both need a tonic," whispered Lord Arnold to his son going into a sitting-room. Cecil nodded approvingly.

"A pint bottle of champagne, waiter, and cigars," Lord Arnold ordered.

The champagne worked wonders in Cecil's countenance. His face resumed its natural color. Altogether he felt in a better frame of mind. His father's indulgence in the vintage worked differently. He became gloomy and irritable. The real blow of the loss seemed to appeal more to him. The friends he had advised of the good thing came before his mind's eye, and their losses. How would they take it? There were always two sides to the question. Had the owner any interest in the drugging of his horse? Was he in the bookmaker's pay? Or had a stable lad been paid by a bookmaker to do it? The latter was the likely thing. But what would the people think? Lord Arnold was proud of his popularity, it pained him to think it would be consequently shaken to no little degree.

A step approaching them on the thick carpet was scarcely heard.

"A happy chance, we meet."

Lord Arnold glanced up from his musings.

"Why, Richard, when did you get here? This is an unexpected pleasure. Well! well! I thought you were too busy with your Edinburgh practice to attend the races," he said jokingly.

"Ah! Lord Arnold, a treat I could not miss for the world. But what a farce! What an outrage! Allow me, my dear friend, to express my sympathy."

"A damnable outrage, Richard."

"Have you learnt who did it?"

"No."

"Suspect anybody?"

"No, Richard. To-morrow I will investigate, and woe betide the culprit should I get hold of him. I warrant he'll never try that game on again."

"Who is your bookmaker, Arnold? I ask your apologies for such an inquisitive question."

"Ah! I see, Richard, you suspect them."

"It is likely, Arnold. They would have lost heavily, I believe, should the coup have come off."

"No, doctor, you are on the wrong scent. Rowerton and Company are a thoroughly honest firm. I have done business with them for several years."

"I am glad to hear it, Arnold. 'Tis sad when an honorable firm goes wrong. By the by, is Mr. Faber, who bought the neighboring estate to yours, connected with the firm?"

"He was, Richard, but he retired from it a couple of years ago. He is a very decent fellow. Nobody will be more annoyed than he at the event of to-day. Especially, I am afraid, because he probably put some money on my mare."

There came a knock at the door. It was one of Arnold's footmen. "The carriage is outside; is his lordship ready?" he asked.

The clock hands pointed to five. Arnold rose. He thought of the dance. It was too late to postpone it, even if he had wished to do so.

"Come, doctor," he said, "permit me to invite you to the Hall to-night. We are giving our usual Handicap celebration," he added with a broad smile.

"But, Arnold, I—I have not my dress-suit with me, so you see it will be impossible."

"No, no, Richard. We will tog you up with a suit. You must come. I insist !"

"Very kind, very kind, Arnold. I submit."

CHAPTER IX.

"Did you ever know such cursed luck, Frank," protested Jim Wheelbox, leaning over the bar and watching the landlord draw him a pint of ale. "'Tis a d—— shame," he added, emphasizing the oath; at the same time thrusting his hands deep into his trousers pockets.

It was the morning after the big race. Jimmy on his way to his daily work had slipped into the bar-room of the renowned White Horse INN. It was not an unusual exploit for him to wet his throat before commencing the day's work, but to-day another reason also brought him there. He thought a chat with the landlord might somewhat relieve his mind. Jimmy felt greatly sore over Queen's defeat in the Handicap. A week before the race he had successfully begged Mr. Lovejoy, Arnold's agent, to advance him a month's wages, on the plea that he could attend the forthcoming races. Lovejoy's advice, "Cut betting out, Jim," he gave a deaf ear to. Jimmy was not repenting, not he. He was too hardened a sinner to be converted in a day. No, it was the loss of his money, money he had put by for a rainy day, his advance wages—all gone—that made him feel

no other than this old world was using him "dashed cruelly."

"'Tis my treat, Jimmy," said the landlord handing him the glass of ale.

"Then I drink hearty. To your best health, Frank."

"Here's to better luck to you next time, Jim," said the landlord, holding a glass of ale he had drawn for himself to his lips, "I might say Jim," he added, "to all of us. For we all fared bad, I trow."

"Now, landlord, your face belies you. Come, if you 'ad allowed that all but Frank have fared bad I'd believed you."

The landlord, swallowing the beer, glanced at the looking-glass above him. The reflection of his beaming face spoke plainly how Jim had guessed the truth.

"Ah, Jim. I meant the racing people. 'Course the bookies would have done well. That stands to reason, eh?"

"Bookies always do, that's a certainty, Frank."

"We would have been pretty well hit if Queen had won. I believe some of us would have had to go out of business."

"You think so, Frank?"

"Sure, Jimmy."

"Maybe you are right, maybe you are wrong. I would not mind being in their shoes now, though. I'll be d——"—he stopped to light the old clay

pipe he had been filling, "I'll be d——," he continued, puffing a big cloud of smoke in front of him, "if the bookies haven't had something to do with the doping of Queen."

He let his large, brawny hand fall heavily on the counter, so that every bottle and glass in the bar-room rattled. The landlord looked relieved that no damage was done.

"There is a reason in your argument," the landlord said, mildly, "but I would not accuse a man, nor any set of people of doing such a devilish trick, until some proof of the person or party is found. Of course you will know, Jimmy, 'tis my business not to quarrel with no man. But believe me, Jimmy," he added, raising his voice slightly, "Lord Arnold will find out sooner or later who did it, he's not blind. I pity the man then!"

"Pity, Frank!" exclaimed Jim. "Not me. I'd give ten years of my life to see the brute hanged. He's ruined many people, the brute. Well, I've stayed long enough, Frank," he added, "I must be at my work, else I'll be getting the sack."

"What are you working at Jim, these days?" asked the landlord, carefully wiping the spilt beer stains off the counter.

"Laying down new drain pipes to the Hall. 'Tis a deuce of a job. Well, so long, landlord."

"So long, Jimmy."

"'Tis a pity he curses so oft," mused the landlord,

"but we would hardly know Jim if he omitted that word, we wouldn't. It's as like 'is trade-mark. Poor Jim! He's all there. A great, big, kind heart 'as Jim."

He was interrupted in his musings by a soft step on the doorstep. The next moment a woman dressed in rags, with an old shawl wrapped around her head, stepped inside. Unloosing her shawl she stood before him. Her face was white and pinched, dark circles stood out boldly below her bloodshot eyes.

"Mrs. Wheelbox!" exclaimed the landlord in an amazed voice.

"It is I, Mr. Yale. Look well, for it is you who have made me like I am. You——"

"Excuse me, my good woman," broke in the astonished landlord, "I do not perceive your meaning. The good Lord knows I 'ave done you no harm."

"I blame you, sir——."

"But, Mrs. Wheelbox. How can you say so?"

"Not any bodily harm, Mr. Yale, but the miserable life I am living, you are responsible for."

"How, my good woman? I fail to understand you," he said indignantly.

"How! You dare to ask! How?" she uttered scornfully. "By you serving your cursed drink to my husband, and robbing him out of every shilling he earns by taking in bets from him."

The landlord felt not a little annoyed. His face went a shade paler.

"Business is business, my good woman," he stuttered, "surely you will admit that?"

"Is gambling business, Mr. Yale? Is there no law to stop it? Do you call it business to serve drinks to intoxicated people? Shame, I say shame, Mr. Yale!"

"Calm yourself, my good woman. You judge harshly."

"Judge, you say, Mr. Yale. No, I did not come here to judge you. God will do that in His good time. I came," there were tears springing in her eyes as she spoke slowly, "only to entreat you to take no more bets from my husband, and to sell him no more liquor than is good for him."

"Oh, Mr. Yale," she pleaded, clasping her frail hands together, "I pray of you to give a little thought to my entreaties. He's a good husband to me when he is sober, ah! I could not wish for a better one then; but when he's drunk, he's a brute."

She let her hands fall to her side, turning sharply round for footsteps outside had caught her attention. They were coming up the steps. She gave one quick entreating glance towards the landlord, slowly turned and glided out of the room just as the opposite door opened, letting in several people.

The landlord sighed. He felt greatly relieved that the unpleasant interview was at an end. But he was most emphatically annoyed with himself. For above all things Mr. Yale hated unpleasantness in any form

or shape. Little had it ever entered his head that he had been doing no other than pleasing, not harming people. To serve drink to those who wanted it was a pleasure to him, for were not the people happy to receive it? Did they not almost beg him to take in their bets, meeting him with smiling faces the next morning should they bet on the winners; then if they did not that day very likely they would the next, for such is the luck of racing, he mused.

"What can I serve you to-day with, gentlemen?" he asked peevishly, still smarting over Mrs. Wheelbox's accusation.

"Beers, beers," ordered Dick Nichol, throwing a wink at his companions, "beer all round. Pray, why look so glum, Frank," he enquired, "anything amiss with yer to-day?"

"Amiss with Frank?" jeered his companion on his right, "I should say so! Aye, Frank. Well I knows if I'd won, say 'alf as much as landlord did yesterday, wouldn't I laugh and smile all day."

The frown that overshadowed his usual beaming face relaxed as he handed them their beer.

"Tut, tut, gentlemen," he said with his usual smile, "what I win one day I only lose the next."

"True. But I fear there won't be so much Avonhurst money placed on Lord Arnold's horses again, after Queen's ado."

"By all means let us hope not."

The landlord glanced towards the swinging door

from whence the voice came. A short sized man with very pleasant features stepped in. It was Lord Arnold's agent.

"Excuse me, landlord, one moment," he whispered, beckoning him into the private parlor.

Yale followed.

"Have you seen Mr. Cecil, Yale?" he inquired anxiously.

"Not since the Handicap was run, Mr. Lovejoy."

"He's nowhere to be found. His bedroom was found unused this morning. By all appearance he must have gone directly after the dance. It is most unusual behaviour for Cecil. His lordship is greatly alarmed."

CHAPTER X.

THE numerous clocks in Ravendale Manor were simultaneously striking two o'clock in the morning, when the last guests of Lord Arnold's most enjoyable ball in honor of the Handicap were leaving for home. The occasion had been a social success. Lord Arnold, with the true spirit of a sportsman, had successfully conquered the memory of the catastrophe of the afternoon.

And what of his son, Cecil?

It may be said that he had imitated his father's stoicism. Little did his father suspect the tragic disappointment that was in his heart, for he concealed his agony with a smiling face.

Constance was not for him, he said to himself. He had been foolish ever to suppose that such a peerless girl would accept him. Cecil had the true humility of a great nature.

As to the fiasco of the afternoon, the pitiful failure of Queen, it seemed to him simply an incident. True, he had lost five or six thousand pounds, but he could afford it—he had large private means, left him by his mother—and it would not have dismayed him much if he had lost five or ten thousand more. He

had a passing wish that the fiend who had done the doping might be brought to justice. But that was not the first thing in his thoughts. He wanted to get away, to get into action. And like many another young man he committed the mistake of determining to get away without any explanation beyond a note to his father. Fortunately, as he thought, when he finally came to this declaration at about three o'clock in the morning, as he sat in the smoking room, his father had gone to bed.

Putting out the lights he went up to his room. There was not a sound in the mansion. The guests had all gone and the household had retired for the night. Throwing himself on the lounge at the foot of his bed, he lay considering the events of the past two days and making plans for the future. Presently he rose and looked at his watch. It was four o'clock. In a few hours it would be daylight. He hastily threw off his dress-suit and put on a grey tweed. Then he put a few things in a travelling bag.

Stealthily he unlocked the door and stepped out into the quiet corridor. Ravendale Manor slumbered. Nobody heard him. He crept silently downstairs. Soon he had unfastened the bolts of the back door and stepped out into the still night. Along the driveway close by the shadowy bushes in the park he crept, till he came to the high road. He turned to the right, which led to the city. A sudden longing came over

him to turn back. His heart began to ache as he realized what he was giving up. Home and all its comforts. A good father, one he loved so well and was leaving with such strange suddenness. "Fool!" he groaned aloud to his inward self as the bitterness of his disappointment surged over him. "That will never do, Cecil," he muttered between his clinched teeth. A streak of light across the eastern horizon reminded him that the day was breaking. He remembered that an early morning train left the station for London. He hastened on, for he meant to catch it. In London he would meet his Oxford friends who had decided to go out to South Africa. It was better to be away from it all.

The darkness faded into a grey sky of early morn. Cecil hastened his steps. Nearing the station he buttoned his overcoat well up over his ears, turning his cap down over his face, so that he would not be easily recognized. Arriving at the station he found that he was only just in time to catch the train. There was nobody astir except the porter and booking agent. He was just in time to scramble into the compartment as the snorting train pulled out of the station.

CHAPTER XI.

LORD ARNOLD was late next morning. It was 9.30 o'clock when he went downstairs to the breakfast room. He touched the bell to summon the butler. Sitting down he picked up the morning paper that had been placed on the table where he breakfasted. His son had not breakfasted, he would be down presently, he thought; seeing that the dishes laid for Cecil had not been used.

Presently the door opened and the valet entered. Arnold glanced up from the paper on the table. There was an anxious expression on the valet's face. He stood for a moment glancing at Arnold then at Cecil's vacant place.

"Mr. Cecil has not come down yet," said Lord Arnold uneasily.

"No, my lord," replied the butler, who had just entered with dishes. "No, I fear something has happened."

"What do you mean?" demanded Lord Arnold, looking startled.

"Tell his lordship," said the butler to the valet.

"I have just come from his room," said the valet.

"Mr. Cecil ordered his shaving water to be brought up to him at 9.30. I rapped several times; there was

no answer. Opening the door, for I found it unlocked—and, your lordship, he could not have slept there. His bed is unused.”

“Great Heavens !” cried Lord Arnold, leaving the room. The butler followed.

They went into Cecil’s room. Arnold’s face betrayed his anxiety.

“Good God !” he groaned, “my son, why?”

He tried to think why his son had deserted him, but he could throw no light on such strange behavior.

“Can I do anything for you, my lord,” asked the butler, when the valet had left. He felt that some great calamity had fallen over Ravendale.

“No, no, Lloyd.” Then Lord Arnold turned and went downstairs to breakfast. But he could not eat. He drank a cup of coffee, then rose and paced up and down the floor. His face hardened—looked set and stern. His eyes, generally so keen and bright, became dull and expressionless. He tried to recall Cecil’s doings the evening before.

“It is as though the poor boy had lost his wits,” he groaned aloud. “He came from sound stock—father, grandfather, great-grandfather, all men sound in body and mind and all honorable men. Can it be possible that he has done something he is ashamed of?”

But he would not allow himself to entertain such a disloyal thought. He stopped suddenly and stood gazing fixedly into the heart of the fire. A sudden

thought that the world at large must not know of this overwhelming despair flashed through his mind. He immediately touched the bell. The butler promptly came in.

"Cecil has taken a holiday, for his health," Arnold said in a slow voice. "There will be a note from him probably to that effect. The Handicap catastrophe unnerved him. No wonder ! No wonder — Lloyd."

"Yes, my lord," answered the butler.

"You understand, Lloyd?" said Arnold, sinking into a chair.

"Yes, my lord."

"You may go, Lloyd." The scandal would go no further Lord Arnold well knew.

He was naturally fond of the boy, and with such fatherly love it hurt his feelings to no little degree that his son should wilfully desert him. He was the only heir. Should anything happen to him the estate would go to his sister Martha. A sudden notion came to Lord Arnold to write to her asking her to come and visit him. She was a very clever woman and would be very likely to assist him. Her counsel, he mused, was always good. Late Martha was a spinster, living at Kensington Gardens, London, a few years Lord Arnold's junior. It was many years since she had visited Ravendale Manor. The place, the quietness of the surroundings, did not suit her. As she grew older, her visits became fewer and further apart. She rejoiced when she heard the tidings that Arnold

had had a son born to him—for she had sworn that if her brother died without an heir, the estate, naturally passing to her, would soon pass out of the Arnold family. She could not abide ever to live there. It would be a calamity to her. The estate had been in the Arnold family for many a generation.

Lady Martha was no doubt a little eccentric. Once she was offered the hand of Lord A—— in marriage, which she refused. It was her first and last offer. She was only nineteen then, and the wish of her childhood had come to pass—to live an old maid. Her younger sister, Eliza was of a different temperament. She had married when she was hardly out of her teens, and had been blessed with several sons and daughters. Her marriage, Lady Martha could but admit, was a very happy one.

Lord Arnold rose. He meant to put the notion of sending for his sister into immediate action. There were some telegram forms in the writing desk drawer. He would immediately send away a wire. The library where Arnold kept his desk and did his correspondence was in the other wing of the house. He rang the bell for Lloyd to clear away the breakfast things. Then he passed across the hall to the library. He had some letters to write too.

“Tell the coachman to have the brougham around at eleven o’clock, Lloyd,” Arnold said as he left the room.

The ancient library, which had been used by the

Arnolds for more than a century, was a large, well-lighted room, beautifully and artistically furnished with old carved oak. Long oak bookcases four in number, stood opposite each other, all of them fully stocked with volumes of every description which would delight the eye of a connoisseur. Volumes ancient and modern were there. Cecil was a great lover of books and had helped to add to the library, from time to time, some of the best modern works.

"This is Martha's retreat," thought Arnold with a smile. He well knew that his sister had inherited the love of good books from their ancestors.

Presently he opened the drawer of his writing-desk. There lay an addressed envelope on the top of the telegram forms. Arnold stood agape. It was his son's handwriting, and immediately he snatched it up and tore it open. The mystery would be solved. This is what he read.

My Dear Father,—Forgive me for coming rather hastily away. I have done nothing that I am ashamed of, but there are reasons why I wish to be away from home for a time. A great disappointment has come to me of which I cannot speak. I have determined to go with some college comrades of mine to South Africa. Rest assured I will do nothing to disgrace the name of Arnold. My mind is made up and I know that you will excuse my sudden departure because it is best.

Your loving son,

CECIL.

Lord Arnold sat down. Snatching a telegram form up he hastily scribbled a wire to his sister. It read :

"Lady Martha Arnold, Kingscote, Kensington Gardens, London. Come immediately. In sore trouble. Arnold."

He rang the bell to summon Lloyd.

"Send this off, Lloyd," he said, "and wait for a reply. Countermand the brougham order !"

Lord Arnold stood until the door closed behind the butler, then a heavy sigh escaped his lips as he flung himself into the chair. His head sank into his hands. "Good God, has it come to this," he groaned aloud.

He rapidly reviewed every recent circumstance with regard to Cecil. What in the world could have led the boy to take such a sudden determination? Was there a woman in the case?

"By George!" he exclaimed aloud, "what about Constance Faber?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE quiet, organized staff of Ravendale Manor fell into a flutter of excitement when they learnt that Lady Martha Arnold was actually coming on a visit. Lady Martha Arnold was a remarkably great lady in their eyes. A woman to be feared. The big establishment would be under stricter discipline, different from the easygoing way in which Lord Arnold managed the household. So the servants told the newer ones who had never worked under Lady Martha's rule. Extraordinary tales they told of how that great lady was here and there and everywhere about the Manor at the same time, seeing that the household was all alert, never keeping her tongue still whether she had need to use it or not. The old housekeeper, old in years and old in long service—for she had been in Arnold's service for forty years—gave more than usual care to Lady Martha's room. It was a special room, never used but when that lady visited the Manor. She was in constant dread that things might not just be to her ladyship's liking. She could not forget Lady Martha's former severe temper. The old soul had one consolation, and that was that time might have softened her ladyship

in some degree. The thought was like balm to her over-excited nerves.

It was a great relief to Arnold when his sister arrived. He had felt a lonely man since his son's disappearance, for he had been accustomed to be his companion. Together they had sometimes gone for a change to the seaside, to the Continent, or to the lakes. Of late he had looked forward with eagerness to his son's vacations. And now for him to be left lonely seemed sad indeed.

Arnold had sent his carriage and pair accompanied by his trustworthy butler, Lloyd, to the station to meet his sister. He did not feel disposed to go himself. He complained of a headache, an unusual thing for him to have, who had never suffered any sort of illness in his life. It was his boast. The arrival of his sister at five o'clock prompt to the minute he had expected her, set his mind at ease, for he had been a little afraid something might have detained her, and he felt that in his loneliness, his constant brooding was unnerving him.

Lady Martha was tired with her long journey, from London to Manchester being no little run from the southern to the northern part of England. She declared railway journeys always upset her, and it was several days before she could get over the bad effects of them. How glad she felt when the carriage pulled up outside Ravendale Manor ! The six-mile drive through the beautiful leafy lanes, the drive-way

through the magnificent part of Ravendale, had no charms for her, in her weary state of mind.

Lady Martha's features were sharp but refined looking. Two curls hung in clusters over each ear. Her hair, once black in color, advancing years had changed to grey. Her nose was an Arnold's but her eyes, a jet black, resembled her mother's.

"Where is Cecil, Arnold?" she enquired after affectionately greeting her brother, as she took off her outdoor jacket and warmed herself by the fire.

Lord Arnold cleared his throat with a slight cough.

"That is why I so urgently sent for you, my dear," he answered gravely. "I do not know."

"You do not know," she cried. "What has happened, Arnold?" She flung herself wearily into an armchair.

"It is an extraordinary affair, Martha," he said, drawing the small table that held refreshments close up to her. "You have no doubt heard of our Queen's defeat in the Handicap?"

"Yes, Arnold. I read an account of it in the *Telegraph*. But what has that to do with Cecil?" she said, handing him a cup of tea. "It was a most disgraceful affair!" she added.

"Outrageous, Martha. The mystery of it must be fathomed. I will not rest until I find out the culprit. Already I have detectives at work. Well, on the top of that the boy has had some other disappointment. Whether it is anything connected with Oxford, or

whether he has been crossed in love I don't know. But at all events he has made up his mind to quit the country for a time and go to South Africa, where trouble is expected. He wrote a note to that effect, Martha, and I've been wondering whether I can, in the circumstances, do anything to prevent him carrying out his wishes. He is no longer a child; he is of age, and must act as a man. Here is the letter, Martha. It is Cecil's handwriting, you see. I found it in the writing desk in the library."

"When did he go, Arnold?" she asked, spreading the letter out.

"On the night of my dance. The first night after the Handicap. He must have gone quietly away after the guests had gone. His bed was found in the morning unused."

Arnold rose and paced the floor.

"Martha," he said, "I have reared Cecil to live and act an honorable life, and my hope is that whatever he does he will not disgrace an honored name. I gather that he proposes to go out with some of his volunteer comrades to fight for his country."

"And you cannot stop him, Cecil," said his sister. "He is not the first Arnold who has gone abroad for the same purpose. God bless him and bring him safe back to us," she said heartily.

"Thank you, dear sister," said Lord Arnold, "that is spoken like yourself and nerves me to bear the disappointment and anxiety. But you are tired, dear!

How forgetful of me to keep you up so late after that tiring journey." The marble clock on the mantelpiece had chimed ten o'clock. He touched the bell, and ordered the valet to summon Lady Martha's maid.

"Chase all thought of anxiety about Cecil from your mind, dear," he said kindly, after wishing her good night.

When she had left the room he flung himself wearily down into an armchair and fell into a deep study.

CHAPTER XIII.

WE must now go back to a period anterior to the scene that has been described, in which Richard Rowerton deceived Cecil Arnold by asserting that he was the accepted suitor of Constance Faber. We go back to a few days before the great November Handicap that was causing so much excitement at Avonhurst and the neighborhood.

Richard Rowerton was pacing the private room in the offices of the firm of Rowerton & Co., in Liverpool. His too indulgent father had determined to give him a chance to make a good position for himself and ultimately to work into the partnership which Ronald Faber had vacated.

The young man had not done well at Oxford, and the bills he had run up there for his paternal relative to discharge, almost broke the record of collegians' extravagance. Richard Rowerton was a spendthrift, and he was always short of money. But he took care to keep this from his father as much as possible.

It was because he was in a particularly bad hole at the present time that he was pacing the floor in a state of considerable nervous anxiety. It was long after office hours, and the caretaker came in to know if he could lock up the place.

"Shall you want me to stay, Mr. Richard?" he said.

"No, Attwood; I have a good deal to do and I may be late. I will close up when I leave."

"I'll stay if you like, sir; I always like to know that the outer door is closed and double locked. There are two locks on it you know, sir. The old governor, sir, is very particular."

"All right, Attwood," said Richard impatiently, "I suppose I'm equal to fastening a door or two. I'll see to that. You go home and smoke your pipe. And, Attwood," he continued as the man turned away: "here's something to buy tobacco with." He put a half-sovereign into the caretaker's hand.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Richard; thank you very much, I didn't doubt, sir, but what you'd lock the door all right."

But as a matter of fact that half-sovereign had the very reverse effect that the giver intended.

Attwood was a very trustworthy man—an army pensioner. Moreover his sojournings in various places on the world's surface had made him a pretty good judge of character. And he had not a very high opinion of Mr. Richard.

"Something's in the wind," he said to himself, "Mr. Richard does not give away half-sovereigns for nothing."

So what Attwood did when he left the office was to double back on the other side of the street, and

ensconce himself at the window of an upstairs lounge of the "Western Shades," an establishment where spirituous liquors were dispensed. The window commanded a full view of the offices where he had just left Mr. Richard. The street at that point was very well lighted, and Attwood had very good eyes. What he saw, after waiting about twenty minutes, was the approach of a horsey-looking man wearing a well-cut black hunting coat, leggings, and a square Derby hat. He seemed to be rather uncertain as to his destination, but after examining the number on the door post, he went quickly in to the Rowerton office.

"Well I'm blowed," said Attwood to himself. "Dablish, the vet." He drank up the glass of ale he had ordered, knocked the ashes out of his pipe and as he rose to go home said again to himself: "Dablish, the vet."

Apparently he could get no further in his cogitations on the subject, for several times during his walk home his steps were arrested, as though some fresh idea had occurred to him. But after each of these stops on his homeward route all he said was: "Dablish, the vet, eh?"

"Well, Dablish, you've come I see," said Richard, with a saturnine smile on his dark face as the veterinary surgeon entered the room.

There was an uneasy expression on "Doctor" Dablish's face, as he answered, "Your telegram seemed as though you particularly wanted me. I

hope it's for nothing like that Oxford business, for I tell you straight that I'll have nothing to do with it."

"Don't be a fool, Dablish," said Richard.

"No, I won't. And I'm not going to be fooled by you either, Master Richard Rowerton."

"Oh, so that's the way it's going to be, is it? Now don't get on your high horse, Dablish, or I'll soon show you it isn't a bit of use. You forget that in that Oxford steeplechase you doped Maxwell's horse. We divided the money—you had your share and nobody was any the wiser. A devilish good thing it was for me, by Jove. I should have been up a tree but for that three thousand. You had *your* three thousand. What have you got to grouch about now?"

"Suppose I was to tell your dad, Richard, that you had instigated the business. Where would you be?"

"And suppose I were to just drop a whisper to two or three members of the Jockey Club, in a quiet way, where would you be?"

"You know, Dick, I only did that out of good nature just to help you. You were in a d——d tight place and it seemed the only way."

"Now, don't snivel like that, Dablish. Did you have the three thousand, or didn't you? If you did, where's the precious kindness come in?"

"Well, what do you want now?" said Dablish peevishly.

"Ah, that's more like business. Have a drink."

The speaker produced from a cupboard a bottle of whiskey, a soda-water syphon and some glasses. He mixed a stiff drink for Dablish, and a much lighter one for himself. Dablish drank thirstily. He looked like one who had absorbed a good deal of whiskey in his time, and was ready to absorb a considerable quantity more. Dablish was reckoned to be very clever, but it was acknowledged that he was fond of his glass.

Richard Rowerton took a cigar and passed the box to Dablish. Then he got up and began to pace up and down the floor.

"Look here, Dick, what's in the wind? You make me deucedly nervous, walking up and down like that like a caged tiger."

"You'd feel tigerish if you were in the hole I'm in now. The fact is I've been playing pretty high lately, and I've lost a good deal of money. D—— the cards. Of course I expected that my luck would turn, and I should recoup myself."

"What amount do you want?" said Dablish.

"I must have ten thousand next week or I'm ruined. Why, dash it all, the fellows I've been playing with are the swells I knew at Oxford—Lord Heriton, Sir James Blanton's son, the Earl of Howitzer and two or three more—connections I must be all right with on account of the business. The old man would have an apoplectic fit if I was a defaulter with these chaps. Our firm does business with their fathers."

"Well, can't matters be tided over a bit?"

"They can not—no use talking. Now here, Dablisth, we're in the same boat, and I don't mind telling you that I have tampered a little with our firm's cash—that's a fact."

Dablisth gave a long whistle.

"If it were a thousand or two, I might let you have it," he said, "but ten thousand!"

"A thousand or two is no use at all. Now look here. Queen must not win the November Handicap."

"Good God! what do you mean?" said Dablisth, rising, an expression of horror on his face.

Richard Rowerton stopped in his restless walk, and pointing his finger at the other said in slow even tones, "I mean, Dablisth, that you must dope Queen in exactly the same way in which you doped the Maxwell horse at Oxford. Considering the risk, I have determined to pay you well. You shall have five thousand pounds for the job as soon as the bets are settled up. Now I've got it all arranged as nice as pie. Glory Boy is the favorite and Glory Boy will win if Queen is properly done for. That will land me at least £15,000, of which you shall have five thousand at once."

"I won't do it; I'm d——d if I'll do it. I've had enough torture of mind on account of that Oxford business."

"Now look here, Dablisth. You are not going to get out of it in that way. Kindly read this."

He handed him a short, written document consisting of one sheet of paper.

Perspiration started out on the brow of the veterinary surgeon as he read the paper. It gave every detail of the Oxford rascality in semi-legal phraseology that clearly inculpated him; his name, residence and qualifications were also given in full.

"Yes, Dablish," said Richard Rowerton, "I'm not taking any chances on this matter. I took the trouble to make four copies of this document, and they are at the present moment in the possession of a confidential friend of mine in London. They are enclosed in separate envelopes and each one of them is addressed to an influential member of the Jockey Club. The envelopes are stamped, and I have instructed my friend to post them in the letter-box at his hotel to-morrow morning. Now, Dablish, you know on which side your bread is buttered and you can determine for yourself whether the sending of this document in this particular way will affect your professional prospects."

"You are the devil incarnate," said Dablish angrily.

"Not quite, my dear fellow, though perhaps I do get a little occasional assistance from the old gentleman."

"Nobody would believe such a thing of me," said Dablish. "Of course it would be sent anonymously, and would go into the waste paper basket."

"Don't you believe it," said Richard, opening a drawer and taking from it several sheets of paper. "How are these for good imitations? You thought I should send the thing anonymously, eh? Not for Joseph. I can do a bit of forging. How is that for Lord Arnold's signature? You've often seen it attached to a cheque made out in your favor. Here's another signature you are well acquainted with. Now the question is, are these things to go or shall I wire my friend to put them in a big envelope and send them back to me, in which case no harm will be done. Come now—is it a go?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Dablish, in futile and sullen anger.

"And, understand me, Dablish. If the doping is not properly done, those documents will all go to their destinations. But that is no reason why you should be short and angry with me. Have another drink and put a few cigars in your pocket—here." And the arch-villain gave him half a dozen of the "old man's" best.

But though he had fortified himself with whiskey, Mr. George Dablish, M.R.C.V.S., passed out into the street with a slinking gait, and a hang-dog expression on his face. He was one of the many who are dogged by the ghosts of their former transgressions.

He had agreed to play the part of the traitor to one of his best friends and most influential patrons. But how could he get out of it?

"The fates are against me—the fates are against me," he muttered.

Of course he could dope the mare. He knew exactly what to put in a hypodermic syringe, and he knew exactly how to use the instrument, so that the mare would scarcely feel the operation.

He knew also that Jarvis, the trainer, could easily be deceived into giving him the opportunity of the few seconds required. Jarvis was as honest as the day and he thought Dablish was honest too. Dablish was Lord Arnold's vet. Dablish had been consulted about the mare's condition again and again. What could Jarvis think was more natural than that the vet. should appear just before the race to see that the animal was in every respect fit for the struggle she was going to make to win the Handicap.

When the fateful day came round the devil-driven veterinary surgeon was on hand. His mind was made up.

He chose an opportunity when Jarvis was alone with Queen in her stall. A few moments would be enough. Mr. Cecil Arnold had just been in to look the mare over and had gone to the grand-stand. The jockey who was to ride Queen was just gone to be weighed.

"Go to her head, Jarvis, I want to look at this off fore foot."

"All right, doctor."

Jarvis held up the mare's head on the opposite side from Dablish.

The vet. lifted up the mare's foot as if to examine the fit of the light shoe. He had the deadly syringe in his hand. He knew exactly where the proper place was to push in the needle point. Beyond a slight start the mare gave no sign. Dablish pushed the piston of the syringe to the end of its stroke.

"She's all right, Jarvis," he said straightening his back.

After the fatal race was over, everybody was too excited to notice that Dr. Dablish was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XIV.

SQUIRE FABER's surprise on hearing that Queen had not won the Handicap was as great as anybody's.

"It's a lesson to me," he said to himself. "What a fool I was to go back to racing after I had determined to leave it alone. Ah, well, perhaps it was worth the money I've lost over it."

It was true that he had plunged. His bet had nearly run into four figures. But it was not to be expected that such an old expert at the business as he was would lay himself open to an entire loss. The telegram which conveyed his betting instructions also conveyed instructions to hedge on Glory Boy to a moderate amount.

The net amount of his loss was perhaps £5,000. A mere flea-bite, considering his large fortune. Still, as he said to himself, it was a lesson.

Mr. Faber was greatly perplexed at the sudden departure of Lord Arnold's son. Very little had transpired as to his leaving home, although the common gossip stated that he had gone on a holiday. Faber knew as all the world did of Queen's tragic performance in the race. From his valet—who had heard from Arnold's—he learnt that Cecil had left

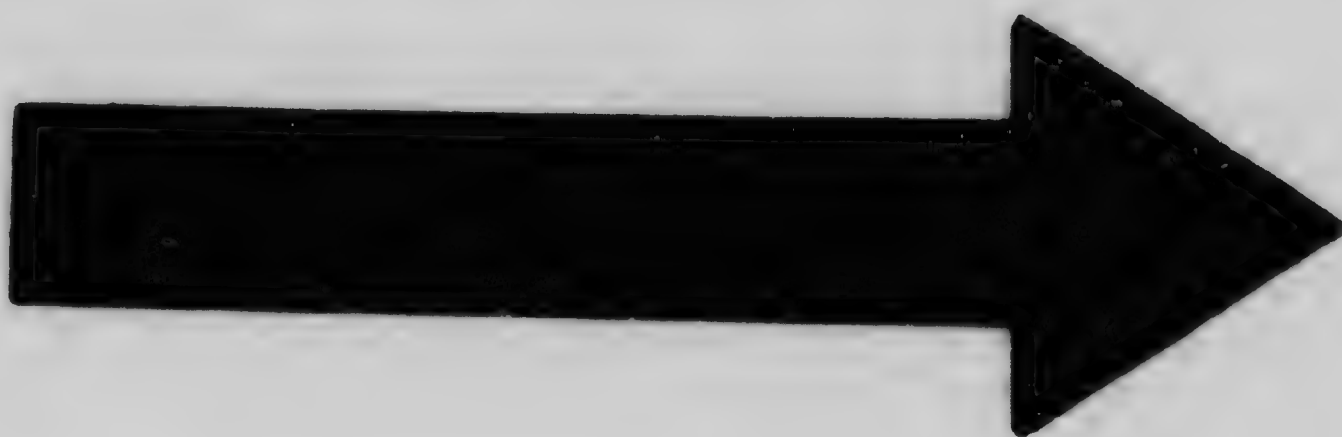
home the night of the dance, for in a country village everybody's business is known. Lord Arnold had evidently had no intimation of his son's going. Why did he sneak out in the dead of night like a thief? It occurred even to Faber's mind, and Ronald Faber was a fair man, that Cecil had made a mistake in departing so suddenly after the doping of the mare. Why did he not stop and help his father to find out who had done the dastardly deed?

Besides, Faber was annoyed because some bright dreams of his seemed to have come to an end. Squire Faber's determination to rise had reached a certain amount of success, but he meant to go further. Was he not the owner of the Avonhurst estate? He had climbed up step by step. Now he was a squire and was making progress, socially, with his neighbors. He was well satisfied with that. But his daughter's interest was dear to him. He wanted to see her married to an eligible suitor of good connections. Cecil Arnold, the only son of Lord Arnold, heir to the great Raven-dale Manor estate, had seemed just the man.

Joyfully he had noticed that Cecil had taken more than a liking to his daughter—his great coup, as he termed it. Constance would connect Avonhurst with the great house of Arnold. A glorious union!

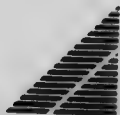
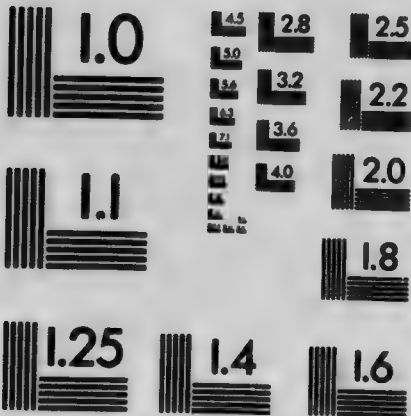
Ronald Faber was musing on these things when he heard a merry voice singing.

He awoke from his reverie. There was a step outside; then the door opened and Constance came in.



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She had been out riding all morning accompanied by her groom. She looked the picture of health as she stood before her father dressed in her blue riding habit, and black billycock hat that exactly suited her open countenance. Her cheeks were flushed red from the morning ride. Her blue eyes twinkled mischievously as she handed her father the *Daily Mail*, which she had ridden to the city to get.

At the first grey light of dawn she had risen from her bed, for she could not sleep. She had felt restless all night long, she hardly knew why. Perhaps she had caught her father's rather sombre mood of the evening before. Gloom is infectious. So she had left the house for a long ride across country before her father had risen. Now she felt quite herself again.

She pointed to the hunting column in the paper, and smiled.

"Ah ! the foxhounds meet here to-morrow. It had quite slipped my memory, Constance."

"Not mine, dad," she said, switching her hunting-crop against her skirts. "I have got so fond of fox-hunting, dad."

"It must be great sport."

Although Mr. Faber had taken great pains that his daughter should be a good rider, by sending her to Nelson's riding school, where many ladies learnt riding, he had not had his leg over a horse.

"I do not think there is a nobler sport than fox-hunting, dad," she said.

"You are very enthusiastic over it, Constance. I am glad. It is good exercise."

Constance smiled.

"Lord Arnold will be there and most likely Lady Martha; she was a famous hunter in her younger days, they say. Then what a pity Mr. Cecil is away. He dearly loves a run with the hounds. Is generally first in at the death, eh, Constance?"

She turned her head away, glancing out of the window. Her mouth twitched slightly. Faber thought he noticed a brighter glow in her flushed cheeks.

"Sometimes, dad," she said, softly. "Yes, he is a good rider. Then he rides an exceptionally fine hurdler," she added, giving a little shrug with her shoulders.

Faber lit a cigar, looking curiously at her.

"He has gone abroad, they say," she said.

"Yes. All alone, Constance, and ——" he stopped abruptly. "Nobody knows where to," he was going to say, when he suddenly remembered that "least said was soonest mended."

"They say he has gone on the Continent, Constance," he said, awkwardly. It might not be true, but it would serve.

"No doubt he is having a good time," she said, half-mockingly.

"Ah—yes—I suppose so. I hear that it was partly business and partly recreation that took him away. I'm sorry he did not give us a call before leaving so suddenly."

There came a rap at the door. The valet came in, holding a silver tray with a visiting card upon it. Faber glanced at it. It was Lord Arnold's.

"Show Lord Arnold up, John."

"Yes, sir," said the valet, with a bow.

Arnold, accompanied by his sister, had been taking a drive around the estate and vicinity. It was Lady Martha's proposal to drive to Avonhurst. She was eager to be introduced to the newly-made squire, partly on account of his charming daughter, whom her brother had been telling her so much about only the night before. So they dropped in for a morning call.

Lady Martha was a quiet judge of human nature. She did not exactly take to Faber, though she saw that he was a man of considerable ability. But with his daughter she was charmed, her personality took the old lady by storm.

"I am sure we will be friends," she said, holding her delicately gloved hand out to Constance, which the latter grasped heartily. Her heart at once seemed to warm towards the older woman.

"I hope so," she said, with one of her winning smiles.

"Miss Constance has been out riding!" remarked Lord Arnold, glancing pleasantly towards her.

"Yes. There are two things I enjoy better than anything, Lord Arnold," she said, "that is riding and good company. One gets both here."

"She is getting spoilt, Lord Arnold," protested her father. "Everybody is too kind to her," he added, jokingly.

"Hardly, hardly, Faber."

"You like the country life better than the city, Miss Faber," said Lady Martha.

"I love it dearly."

"That is more than I do. It is too quiet. Is it not a blessing people have different views of life? I am with you, heart and soul, with your former taste. I, too, love riding. When I was your age I was called the best huntswoman in the district. Then I rode with several different packs, so that I feel entitled to boast. That is many years ago."

"Ah, Martha," said her brother, proudly, "for your age you are a remarkably able huntswoman. Miss Faber," he added, "you will be able to test your skill against my sister's to-morrow."

"That will be too much for me, I fear," said Constance, with sparkling eyes.

"I'll lay a fiver that my daughter gets in first at the death, my lord."

"Accepted, Squire," said Lord Arnold, extending his hand good-naturedly towards him to close the deal with a handshake.

"No, no. I will not allow a wager to be laid on it," protested Lady Martha.

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Constance.

"I humbly withdraw my challenge," said Faber.

"We have been overruled by the ladies."

"Ah, ladies will get their own way, Squire," he said, jokingly.

Lord Arnold laughed.

When Lady Martha got home she came to several conclusions. Constance was not only a beautiful but a remarkably lovable girl. Cecil's behaviour seemed more deplorable than ever to her. It seemed more idiotic than she had at first thought it to be. Why should he run off to South Africa with a pack of hot-headed youths? She knew it was one of her brother's wishes to see his son married. Was not Cecil the last of the race? If the Arnolds' famous name was to be perpetuated, it was a real necessity that he should marry, and very desirable that he should marry well. And here, only a few miles away from Ravendale Manor, lived a girl, the only child, and heiress to a fine neighboring estate. True, her father, from a society point of view, might be regarded as a bit off color. But his daughter was a girl a prince might be proud to wed. A girl whose appearance was second to none in the kingdom! "Cecil, Cecil!" she groaned, "why on earth have you behaved like a madman?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE Rector of Ravendale Manor, the Rev. B. A. Lash, who was sometimes spoken of by detractors and candid friends as the "sporting parson," might have been seen on the following day, mounted on his bay cob and jogging along the road towards Avonhurst Hall, where the foxhounds were scheduled to meet at 10.30 a.m. There was not one meet in a dozen that he, and his cob, ever missed going to; though it was not always he took the run with the hounds across country. Of late he only rode to the meet, following the huntsmen and hounds, until the dogs broke away with a fox from cover, when he would leave them, and ride home. On this day he felt a run with the hounds would not be amiss. He had been studying rather more theology than was at all usual with him, and a run across country over hedge and ditch on his gallant cob would, he thought, brush the cobwebs from his brain. Besides this, it is possible that an impulse of admiration for Constance Faber had helped to bring him. Yet he would not have it was so. Oh, no, the Rector of Ravendale Manor, a confirmed bachelor, turned forty, could surely not be influenced by a pretty girlish face; the

face of a girl hardly out of her teens! Dear me, no! Still, it was easy to see which way the wind blew. There was no getting away from it that the Rev. Mr. Lash was an ardent admirer of Constance Faber. Since she had come into the district she had performed more good offices for the poor and needy of his flock than anyone else had ever done. She was frequently in his thoughts, however he tried to banish her image. The reverend sportsman spurred his cob into a gallop.

The Rev. Mr. Lash came into the living when his father, who had been rector of Ravendale Manor more than thirty years, died. It was said—but I will not vouch for the truth of it—that his father had been of such sporting proclivities that he had the church bells in the old belfry ring out a merry peal to celebrate the victory of a former Lord Arnold's Cipher when that horse, one year, romped home with the Malchester November Handicap. Another yarn, that never seemed stale to the inn-keepers at the White Horse Inn, was that his lordship—when Lord Arnold—gave a holiday to all his workmen and laborers, paying their expenses on a trip to the seaside after that horse had achieved his famous victory. Since the rector was born from an old line of country parsons, with their peculiar tithes and privileges allotted them, it was, therefore, natural that he should develop the sporting instinct that so vividly showed itself in him.

The day was an ideal one. Although the early morning threatened to be disagreeable, all doubts vanished when the sun's rays dispelled the gloom, driving the mist and fog away long before noon. Long before the hour the hounds were scheduled to meet, a large throng of huntsmen and ladies had gathered outside Avonhurst Hall. There were many of Arnold's and Faber's tenants there, some mounted on second-class hunters, others even rode their best farm working horses. None who could afford it would miss the hunt. Then came a noisy throng of jovial pedestrians. Some of these claimed that they could easily distance, on foot, many of the clumsy looking cart horses on which some of the farmers were mounted. No mean boast, judging by the looks of one or two of those same horses.

In the meantime, slight refreshments, by invitation, were partaken of at the Hall. This was a great occasion for Mr. Faber, and he was determined to make the most of it. He was pleased to see the neighboring gentry in their pink coats and sporting attire indulging in sandwiches and champagne.

It was proposed to draw the Doff Spinney with the dogs, where Mr. Faber anticipated a fox would be located. The talk in the spacious hall of the mansion was merry and bright, and when his guests were ready to start, Squire Faber proposed a toast, "A good run and a catch," which was heartily drunk, after which the guests joined the throng outside.

Mounting their hunters, which they had left in the care of the grooms, they followed the whippers-in, who were taking the dogs towards the spinney.

Arnold, Lady Martha, Constance and the Rector rode together. Lady Martha's horse was slightly bigger than Constance's, otherwise there was not much to choose between them as regards quality in horseflesh. Ronald Faber had spared no expense in purchasing the best hunter obtainable on the market, and vouched for by a vet.'s certificate; while the Arnolds' breed of hunters are famous throughout the land. But a striking and almost laughable difference in horseflesh was remarked on by many there, namely that afforded by the rector's cob and the magnificent hunters that Constance and Lady Martha rode. Lady Martha looked years younger than usual in her riding habit, and sat her horse as gallantly as in her younger days, at least so thought her brother.

"You have lost none of your gumption, old " he whispered, reining his horse alongside of her, as they waited on the outskirts of the spinney, while the dogs' shrill whine as they darted through the thick undergrowth, hot on the scent, was music to the huntsman's ears. Any moment, they knew, a fox might break out. Lady Martha smiled at her brother's fraternal admiration.

"We will know soon, old chap," she said. And the grey-headed man felt like a boy again, and

thought of the time when he and his sister had raced over this very neighborhood on their ponies.

"Ah! they are coming this way, Miss Constance," said the rector, glancing towards her. The dogs' voices grew louder and louder. But it was so to be. The hounds suddenly doubled back, straight across the middle of the spinney, breaking the fox out on the opposite side. Immediately the clear shrill note of the horn, "Hark, hark, away!" rose on the still air. In a moment the field was astir with galloping horsemen. At the first note of the horn Constance's well-trained hunter jumped into a gallop, followed by Lady Martha and Lord Arnold, while the rector on his cob acted as whipper-in. Around the spinney they went, joining the throng on the opposite side in full cry after the fox. The first jump—a hedge—was successfully cleared by all the men with the exception of the rector. His cob refused to leap, swerving round so that he had to leave his party, and make for the open gate, where the outclassed horses were teeming through, followed by the jovial crowd of pedestrians. The reverend gentleman felt like swearing aloud, but remembering his dignity in time, he restrained himself. He felt somewhat out of the meet, but furiously urged his cob at full gallop through the open gate, getting a glimpse of his friends taking the hedge on the opposite side of the field he had just entered.

If the hedge had been a low one, if there had been

a gap, his cob would have taken it. But the fine jumping of the hunters had not broken the hedge. Luck was certainly against the rector. Away he went at full gallop across the grass land, hard after the fleeing horses ahead. As he neared the hedge he spotted a gap made by one of the hunters; he headed towards it, and the cob rose in the air, nimbly clearing it. On, on, he raced across the next field, leaving the majority of the huntsmen far behind. But those who had gained on him, where were they? Alone he cantered along, across stubble, grass and fallow land. Presently the land rose in a steady ascent before him. He spurred his cob on, faster and faster. The gallant cob responded gamely to his touch. Reaching the top he caught a glance of the hounds away ahead, followed by ten or twelve horsemen and horsewomen; he could not quite make out the exact number. It was the remnant of the large field. The balmy air, as he rushed madly through it, intoxicated him. Cares and troubles he had let go to the wind. He felt like a schoolboy let loose from school. He knew he would soon be with that small band of horsemen ahead, and in at the death.

Where were the fifty horsemen? Most of them hopelessly defeated! Among the lady hunters who were with the small band of hunters he knew that Constance and Lady Martha would be found.

"Bravo!" He could not help the exclamation

escaping from his lips. "Hurrah! hurrah!" he shouted. He caught a glimpse of the fox. The hounds were close behind. His gallant cob strained every nerve to keep up with the great race the fox was giving them. Now Reynard would gain a little, then would lose ground. Nearer and nearer the dogs drew towards him, until the leading hound appeared to the rector to be only a yard away from the coveted bushy tail. Now he was making for the high road. Would he cross? Would they kill before? A tall hedge divided the road from the grass land. In a moment the fox bounded through, hardly a foot ahead of the dogs. Along came the huntsmen, one, then another leaped their horses over. Suddenly one of the horses, taking the leap, tripped, then fell.

"Good God!" escaped from the rector's lips, as he guided his cob to the scene of the accident. In another moment a terrible yell of barking and growling hounds met the air. They had killed; he was in at the death. But what a death! The thrill, the excitement of it soon faded. For before him, on the ground, surrounded by a few people, lay Lord Arnold. His horse some yards away, lay where he had fallen, quite dead. The animal had broken his neck. Lady Martha was stooping over her brother, and Constance was by her side. Lord Arnold had broken his leg, and was in great agony. A couple of horsemen had gone to the Manor to fetch a car-

riage. The fox had taken them a run across country to within half a mile of Ravendale Manor.

When the carriage came they lifted Lord Arnold in, and made him as comfortable as was possible. Amid the confusion of the little rector's thoughts there was certainly a feeling of thankfulness that Constance had escaped the dangers of the hunting field.

CHAPTER XVI.

RICHARD ROWERTON was in the private office of his father's firm, alone, a day or two after the November Handicap had been run, with such disastrous results to Queen.

"By Jove! it was a near squeeze," he said to himself, as he leaned back in his chair, smoking one of his "governor's" expensive cigars.

But he was experiencing a great sensation of relief. Instead of being pulled this way and that with anxiety, everything was now "O.K."

He had landed £15,000 by the defeat of Queen. He had paid his "debts of honor" to his gambling companions, Lord Heriton, young Blashton and the Earl of Howitzer. He had replaced the securities he had "borrowed" from the firm's safe, and he had in hand the £5,000, which was now due to Dablich for doping the mare.

He pulled a new bank pass-book from his pocket and looked over its pages, finally adding up each side in pencil.

"Yes," he ejaculated, "six thou. to the good. Now I'm ready for good old Dablich."

His mind went back over the circumstances of

their last interview in that very office. He recalled the difficulty he had experienced in getting Dablish to promise to dope the mare, and chuckled at his own cleverness in subduing the vet. to his infamous plans. Then the thought occurred to him, Why pay Dablish this £5,000? Supposing he put him off, Dablish could do nothing. For his own sake the vet. would not breathe a syllable as to their little transaction. Besides, he, Richard Rowerton, had given him nothing in writing. Dablish might cut up a bit rough, but still it was possible to put him off with say, £1,000, and jolly him along with the idea that he would get the rest later. Four thousand pounds was a very useful little sum to have in the bank. Ah, well, perhaps he'd better "let well alone," and pay him the £5,000. "It was such a d——d near squeak," he said aloud as he came to the end of this train of thought.

But why had not Dablish been round to the office for his money? That was the riddle that was at the back of Richard Rowerton's head at the present moment.

A step was heard outside and Rowerton, senior, came in, looking jolly and prosperous, his ruddy, honest face beaming with health.

"Well, Dick, my boy," he said, "here you are at business like a good chap, while I've been taking it a bit easy."

"Oh, that's all right, dad; time you did."

"Well, Dick, I tell you it's no end of a pleasure to me to think you've chucked the cards and chips, and are sticking to business. I suppose I've had as much sporting money through my hands as here and there one, but, Dick, my boy, I always stuck to the one thing, and my customers could always depend on me. But what I wanted to say, Dick, was that I've just come from Drake and Dutton's office—the accountants, you know. I thought we ought to have the books just checked over and the securities and bank account, and so on."

"All right, father; any time you say," replied his son.

"I've been thinking, Dick, that it wouldn't be half a bad thing to give Jackson an interest in the business. He's been with me for ten years as head clerk, and he's a clever chap, and as honest as they make 'em. Now it will be better for you to have a partner—for, of course, if things go on as they are going, I shall take you into the firm—than for you to bear all the responsibility. You see, Dick, my boy," said the old man, putting his hand affectionately on his son's shoulder, "I'm getting older all the time, and I want to make everything shipshape, so that the old firm of Rowerton and Co. shall go on as it always has done."

"That's the way to talk, dad. I'll do *my* best."

"Spoken like a man, Dick. How much you've improved since a few years ago!"

"I've sowed my wild oats, dad, and I've done with 'em."

At this moment, Dick Rowerton really, for a moment or two, felt truly virtuous, and as though he was turning over a new leaf in earnest. He felt as though he would be able to put his black deed with regard to Dablish and the mare, into the back-ground. Yes, he would pay Dablish, cover up the transaction and forget it. A gleam of sunshine fell across his dark mind.

"Well, Dick, I'll go into the clerks' office and dictate a letter to Drake and Dutton. They may as well come on Monday. Then I'm off to golf. I have to play off a match with old Tom Coffin. An old man's game, Dick, but it keeps me healthy."

And the "governor" went into the front office to dictate his letter.

Dick Rowerton stood up and slapped his leg. "By Jove what a near squeak!" he said. "Suppose the accountants had come last week! Great Scott! what a near squeak!"

After a few minutes his father put his head in at the door.

"I say, Dick," he said, "there's an awful stink being kicked up about Arnold's mare. There's no doubt she was doped. And the last news is that Lord Arnold's had an accident in the hunting field and broken his leg. He was setting the detectives to work in all directions, but I suppose now, all that

will be hindered a bit. It's a funny business. What do you make of young Cecil Arnold going away just after the race?"

"Perhaps he knew something about the doping and didn't want to be questioned," said Dick, lapsing from his momentary mood of virtue.

"Cecil Arnold? Not he. Cecil Arnold's as straight as a die; no hanky-panky about *him*. Besides, he must have lost quite a bit through the thing."

"Oh, well, all I can say is it's very peculiar," said Dick.

"Well, ta-ta, my boy, be good, and take care of yourself."

And Rowerton, senior, went off to his golf, leaving his son the prey of conflicting emotions. The feeling of triumph at his coup was evaporating, and a certain amount of anxiety was taking its place. Dick Rowerton had systematically kept his conscience under, refusing to listen to its demands. But occasionally it would inflict its poignant sting. It was one of those moments now. Somehow or other the words he had once heard a Salvation Army preacher shout in the street as he was passing, came into his mind, "Be sure your will find you out."

CHAPTER XVII.

A WEEK elapsed, and still Dr. Dablish did not go to Dick Rowerton for his ill-earned money.

Dick had expected him round on the day after the race, and now it was getting on for three weeks since that event. Where could Dablish be?

The accountants were at work in the office of Rowerton and Co., auditing the books, and therefore Dick could not get away to investigate the mystery of Dablish's absence. He was being referred to for information every moment. Occasionally, Rowerton, senior, came in for an hour, but his visits generally ended with the formula, "I believe you can get on better without me than with me."

Then the accountant would say politely, "You undervalue yourself, Mr. Rowerton. Of course, if you have anything else to do, we can get along."

"Well, you see, I've always been an open-air man. I could never abide being in a stuffy office; I've always had good men to attend to that. But the racecourse for me every time," he would say, shortly afterwards taking his departure.

As for Richard, he could not but congratulate himself that his tampering with the books and cash had

been put right. The books were conducted on the loose-leaf system, and this clever young man, when he abstracted the cash and securities, took care to "cook" the accounts by putting in a fraudulent leaf or two temporarily. Dick was up to the mark in fraudulent figuring. But he retained the original pages, and had put them back and made everything right before his father had surprised him by the news that the accountants were coming.

Still, he thought, what if he had left some loophole; had forgotten some little thing that might turn up and prove his duplicity valuable? So, in addition to his anxiety about Dablish's non-appearance, he had a constant feeling of uneasiness. There was following him up. He could not sleep in the middle of the night, and all the circumstances of his dealings with Dablish would come before him like a play acted on the stage. In vain would he try to get to sleep again. He would toss from one side to the other all night and come down to the office looking pale and haggard. He was afraid to stay away and he was afraid to go there.

He made up his mind that when the accountants had finished their audit he would go away for a while somewhere and try to forget the entire business.

As a matter of fact the accountants discovered nothing. Dick's deceptive ability had been equal to the task. Drake and Dutton finished their audit and went away to their offices to prepare the balance-sheet. Dick breathed freely again.

But still the question forced itself upon him, Where was Dablish?

He made up his mind to visit the vet. Dablish was a bachelor. He lived in a neat country place about two miles from Lord Arnold's training stables, employing as servants a reliable man and wife. The latter looked after the domestic part of the establishment, while the husband was groom and gardener. The place was kept as trim and neat as a new pin.

Dick went to the nearest railway station by train and took a fly to Dablish's.

"You'd better wait," he said to the driver, "I may want you to take me back again."

He went up the neat garden walk to the front door, and rapped with the brightly-polished brass knocker.

The housekeeper appeared, wiping her hands on her apron. She was a clean, comely person of forty, who was evidently just in the midst of preparing a meal.

"Oh, it's Mr. Rowerton," she said, dropping a curtsey. "Come in, sir."

"Is the doctor in?" said Richard.

"Why, no, sir, it just jumped into my head as soon as I saw you that perhaps you could tell us something about him. Why we haven't seen him for more than three weeks. Of course he's been in the habit of being away without ever saying anything—he's very funny in that way. But this has been

an extry long time, sir. Come in and set down, 'sir, and I'll go and call my husband. He's in the stables. And you'll stay and have some lunch, sir? The doctor always says, 'If anybody comes, Mrs. Marshall, always give 'em a bit o' summat to eat and drink.' If you'll come into the dining-room, sir, I'll call Marshall in half a jiff."

"Well, thank you, Mrs. Marshall; I'll just dismiss my cabman."

Mr. Marshall was in the house when he returned. He respectfully saluted Dick.

"Yes, sir, we was in hopes as we should ha' heerd summat about the governor before this. He went away from here the day afore the Handicap, sir. I thought he was looking just a bit anxious-like about summat."

"Did he say anything particular to you before he went?"

"Nothing very much, sir. You see the doctor's a curious sort of man, sir. Me and the missis havin' been with him so long you see, sir, we've got used to his ways like. The night before he went away I think he'd been having a glass or two, and he had some whiskey when he come home. He calls me in says, 'Marshall,' he says, 'you're a rough sort of beggar,' he says, 'd——n your eyes,' he says, 'but you are straight.'"

"Well, what did you say?"

"I says, 'Thank you kindly,' I says, 'I hopes as

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I allus shall be,' I says. Then he says, 'Bring another glass and have a drop o' whiskey,' which in course I did. I could see he was half seas over. Well, sir, he looked at me an' p'inted his finger at me and says, 'Allus be straight, Marshall, never do any crooked business.' I wondered what he meant. He kep' harpin' on that. 'Never do nothin' crooked,' he says. But he had his senses all right. Arter a bit I went to the kitchen. But I didn't go to bed. By and by I heerd him walking up and down this dining-room, and every now and again he'd swear and pound his fist on the table. But by-and-by he got quieter. I went and looked in, and he had a lot of papers about and was writing and smoking his pipe. Arter about an hour he rang the bell, and I went in, and he says, 'Marshall,' he says, 'I'm going away in the morning, and I may be gone some days. I want you to get Farmer Jones to come over here in the morning, to witness a bit of a dockyment.' Then he asked me if Tom Winder, the thatcher, could write? 'Well,' I says, 'he can write his' name, because when I paid him for that last job,' I says, 'he gave me a réceipt.' 'All right,' he says, 'get him across, too. And get 'em here between eight and nine, because I've got a train to ketch.'"

"And what then?" said Dick Rowerton, with breathless eagerness.

"Well, sir, he went to bed his usual time and slept quiet, and up in the morning as bright as a trivet.

It's always the way with him, sir—never seems to feel the drink a little bit. I goes over and gets Jones and Winder, and they comes into this 'ere room and witnesses his signature, and puts their names to it, and he gives Farmer Jones a glass o' whiskey and to Tom Winder he gives half-a-sovering, cos Tom told me arterwards. Then when they was gone, he calls me in, and gives me a big envelope directed to Lawyer Whitchurch—that's his lawyer, sir—and says to put the pony in the cart and let the boy drive over to the lawyer's, and be sure and give it him safe. So in course I went an' done it, an' harnessed the pony and sent the b'y off and went back an' told him.

"Yes, and what then?"

"Well, then, sir, he says, 'That's all right,' he says; 'no crooked work about that,' he says. 'Now get the mare in the dog-cart,' he says, 'and drive me to the station.' Which in course I did. And that was the last I see of him. What beats me is he took no luggage with him. There's his travelling bag upstairs in his room, where he always keeps it."

"Well, it's a peculiar state of things, certainly," said Dick. "Where in the world can he be?"

He said these words because he felt he had to make some comment. Beneath his assumption of indifference lay a deep and gnawing anxiety almost amounting to terror. There was a mystery about all this that he could not fathom. And the entire circumstances filled him with instinctive dread, which was not alleviated by Marshall's next observation.

"They are raising a deuce of a row about the doping of Lord Arnold's mare, *aren't* they, sir? By George! what a wicked action! I should like to pull on the rope to hang the feller that did it, hanged if I shouldn't."

"Yes, and I suppose the detectives have been making all sorts of enquiries?"

"You are right, Mr. Rowerton. They've been here, questioning me to rights. *And* the missis. I told 'em word for word what I've told you, sir—that accounts for me havin' it so pat. Tell the truth, I've told it to two or three—Farmer Jones and Winder, and one or two more. And there was a cove came from the *Daily Mail*, and I told him. Didn't you see it in the *Mail*, sir?"

"No. I've been very busy at the office lately, and had no time to look at the papers."

Here Mrs. Marshall came in to lay the cloth, and Dick, the prey to conflicting feelings, said he would go and look at the stables.

"By the way, if you have any whiskey handy, I should like a drop," he said.

"Certingly, sir," said Mrs. Marshall, producing a bottle of "House of Commons Scotch." Dick poured himself out a stiff glass and followed Marshall to the stables. What a nice, quiet little place, he thought. Here, Dablich must have felt quite at home, and when his business was done he could sit down, smoke his pipe, and feel comfortable.

Yes, a good sort of man said Conscience, and you, Richard Rowerton, have led him wrong. He wanted to befriend you, and he was too weak to stand against your wiles.

But the whiskey soon circulated through Richard's veins, and he tossed these thoughts aside. He was even able to sit down and do some justice to Mrs. Marshall's excellent lunch, after which he asked Marshall to drive him to the station.

* * * * *

It is said that criminals—murderers especially—are impelled by a strong desire to revisit the scene of their crimes. Though common-sense would lead them to put as great a distance as possible between themselves and the neighborhood of their misdeeds, they are, as it were, fascinated by the remembrance of the place where they did the devil's work.

Some such feeling as this prompted Richard Rowerton to take his ticket to the nearest station to the racecourse on which the November Handicap was run.

He left the train, and began to walk in the direction of the familiar ground. How different everything was from the appearance it presented on the eve of a great race! Very few people were on the road. When he reached the racecourse it was comparatively deserted. The grand-stand was a gaunt, empty assembly of seats, that looked as if it never

could have been the scene of a fashionable display. In the dreary weather of this late November afternoon it looked hopelessly miserable. The stables were untenanted; not a soul was about.

He wandered away from the racecourse along a lonely road that led through fields, and over which blew the wintry blast, for a storm had begun to rise that bent the trees and bushes with its sweeping gusts. And along with the wind came a sleety rain. It would be worth while, he thought, to go for shelter to a copse of evergreens that lay a distance off. He got over a stile and went towards it. It was a clump of Scotch firs, with an undergrowth of bushes and ferns. As he went he bent his head against the driving sleety blast. When he got to it he lifted his head, and to his great surprise was confronted by a man, standing just within the shelter of the little wood.

"Good day," said the man, curtly, in response to Rowerton's exclamation of surprise.

"It's a beastly afternoon for anybody to be out," replied Richard.

"So I suppose you are out on business, sir, as I am. Connected with the racing business, sir?"

"A little," replied Richard, cautiously, "I have to come up here now and again to look round."

"I wish to goodness anybody else had got my job this afternoon."

"Ah, what's that, then?"

"Well, you see, sir, I'm the county constable about here, and a cove has gone and shot himself in this 'ere wood, and I've got to watch the body till the detectives come back with a wagon. Leastways there's one other officer; he's standing by *it*. When I seen you coming across the field I thought, at first, you was one of the 'tecs."

"Have you any idea who the man is?" said Richard, a nameless dread stealing over him.

"They said his name was Dablich. He had a many papers on him. The detectives have taken *them*. Seems to have been in some sort of trouble, poor fellow. Very respectably dressed, too," said the constable, as he led the way through the wood.

If he had seen Richard Rowerton's face it would have excited his wonder, possibly his suspicions. Abject fear and guilt were depicted there. The wretched young man tried to speak, but his voice failed him. At last he pulled himself together and said, "Look here, I don't think I want to look at a dead body on such a beastly day as this. I'm chilled to the bone. I must have a run to get my blood into circulation."

"Oh, very well, sir, it's for you to say, of course."

"Here, get yourself something to drink," said Richard, putting half-a-crown into the constable's hand.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said the man; "he's only a step further if you'd *like* to see him, but if

not, why of course tastes vary. Let every one please themselves is my motto."

"Well, good afternoon," said Richard.

He started to run. He felt that he must get away at all hazards. Who could tell what Dabish had written before he shot himself?

He ran in the opposite direction from which he had come; on through the driving sleet; on through the gathering darkness. He came at last to a small wicket-gate opening on the road and leading up to a lonely house. Somebody had evidently just gone in and had left a bicycle standing there. In an instant his mind was made up. Leaping upon it, he was soon going at a rapid pace along the winding road. He did not meet a soul, and in half an hour he reached the next railway station. Concealing the bicycle in some bushes, he walked into the station, and found he was just in time for a train to Liverpool. He must get away; but first of all he must have funds.

It was after office hours when he got to Liverpool, so that there was nobody to interfere with his operations. He found that the cash-box in the safe contained about £1,000. Taking this, he left his cheque for the amount. He also wrote to the chief clerk, Mr Jackson, saying that he had done this and that he had been hurriedly called away to see a friend in Scotland.

Then he went to the railway station and boarded

an express train for London. Nobody noted his presence in the crowd. He felt that his best plan was to absent himself for a time. Who could tell what Dablish might not have written before he died? Retribution was beginning to dog his footsteps.

And not the least part of it was the feeling of horrible uncertainty under which he now labored. Perhaps he was a fool to go away at all. It might excite suspicion. At any rate he would be called as a witness at the coroner's inquest. He fancied the lawyers questioning him.

And then again came the dreadful question—What had Dablish written before he determined on his dreadful deed? After all it was best to keep in the background, thought Richard. At the office they would think he had gone to Scotland. That would put them off the scent for a week or two.

But as the train went on through the darkness Richard began to curse the day he was born and to ascribe to an evil "fate" the consequences of his own transgressions.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LORD ARNOLD, propped up by pillows, sat in an easy chair in his spacious bedroom. A bright fire burned in the grate. The nurse had just gone out of the room, and Lady Martha sat on the other side of the fire.

"I shall never be the man I was, Martha," said the invalid, moving uneasily in his chair.

"Don't say so, Cecil," said his sister, "you'll get round, all right. You have a strong constitution, and you aren't the first that's had an accident in the hunting-field. Why, you and I can remember five or six that were a good deal more broken up than you were. You know what Uncle Edward used to say. He vowed that he was broken all to bits, and they had to gather him up in a basket."

A faint smile passed over Lord Arnold's face at the remembrance. Then he said, "Ah, Martha, you forget the succession of things. They were enough to shake a fellow. First, that awful November Handicap. Then Cecil takes it into his head to go off, nobody knows where. Then after that to be chucked over the head of one's horse and shaken up as I was."

"My dear Cecil," said Lady Martha, rising and stroking her brother's white hair affectionately, "you really must not talk so. Of course I know it was a dreadful fall, but don't I tell you how other people have had falls and got all right again?"

"You are a good sister, Martha."

"I don't suppose I'm better than others," she replied.

Presently her brother said, "Old Rowerton and I had quite a talk yesterday, *didn't* we?"

"Yes, I think it was too long a confab. You are suffering from it to-day. He was with you too long."

"Oh, I don't know. I like to know how things are going. The rummest thing he told me was that *his* son is gone away somewhere without rhyme or reason. And say, Martha, he told me all about the inquest on poor Dablish. What in the world made a straightforward, decent chap like that commit suicide? No reason found for it. Not a clue left. Accounts all straight; a handsome balance in the bank, besides an investment or two."

"Who will have his property?"

"Made his will the day before. Left £500 to Marshall and his wife, his servants. The rest to his sister—lives at Nottingham, I believe. No, it's a funny business."

"Not much funny about it, in my opinion," said his sister; "I think it's perfectly dreadful."

"Well, you know what I mean, Martha—don't

expect a sick man to be too particular about his words—of course it was a dreadful thing.”

“And no reason for it,” said Lady Martha. “He must have been off his head.”

“Of course he was. By the way, I never had much fancy for that scapegrace, young Rowerton. Old Sir James Blashton told me about him. A pretty warm ‘un, I should say. His father’s as straight as a die, but I wouldn’t trust the young ‘un with a shilling.”

“Yet, he’s with his father in the bookmaking business, isn’t he?”

“Well, yes. The old man was telling me he’d thought of taking him into partnership. He’s taken his head clerk into the firm. It was rather a peculiar thing, his wanting to sound me as to his taking his son in. But, then, look at the business he’s done with the family of Arnold for this last forty years. I think he regards me as his best customer.”

“Well, Cecil, you couldn’t very well advise him not to take his own son into partnership,” said Lady Martha.

“No. That was the awkwardness of it. I got out of it by shrugging my shoulders, and saying he musn’t ask me. But I can’t even shrug my shoulders much now, can I?” said the nobleman, with a wan smile.

“You poor old chap,” said his sister, kissing him. “You mustn’t talk so.”

Just then the valet came in, bringing the letter bag that one of the grooms had brought from the post-office. Lady Martha was always very particular about this leathern receptacle, with its brass lock, and had kept the key of it since her brother's accident. She now produced the same from her girdle, and proceeded to unlock it and shake out the contents on to a little table that stood there. Fifteen or twenty letters were thus exposed. She looked them over hurriedly, sorting out those which were for herself. Presently she came to one that bore a foreign stamp and postmark. She held it up.

"Here, at last, is a letter from Cecil!" she exclaimed.

"You don't say so!" said her brother, his face suffused with smiles.

"Yes, dear old chap—addressed to you. So there you are, and don't let me hear another word about your being done for. Come, buck up, and be yourself."

"Well, this is a great thing," said her brother, taking his son's letter in his hand, and hastily tearing it open. "Give me my spectacles, Martha," he said.

With eager eyes he perused the two sheets of note-paper, covered with his son's well-known caligraphy. Now a smile, and now a frown, anon a pursing of the lips, indicated his paternal feelings.

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For the benefit of the reader the letter may here be given.

Cape Town, Dec. 7, 18—.

My dear Dad,

For thus I have always called you, and you are always in my thoughts. I feel that I have not been playing the game in leaving you so long without a word, and for this I am most awfully sorry. But, really, my dear governor, we've been so confoundedly busy ever since we got to this confounded country that I have scarcely had a moment. And when I had time there was no place to write. Please forgive me, dad, and I "won't do so no more."

Our coming here was a bit previous. The fact is I listened to the entreaties of half a dozen of my Oxford comrades in the volunteer yeomanry. Some of them had relatives out here, and the Boers had begun to be a bit nasty. Everybody who isn't a Boer they call "outlanders," and are as unpleasant to them as they can be. The thing will come to a head later, I feel sure, but at present they are not proceeding to extremities, and so our expedition was, as I said, a little previous. We had one bit of a row with them, however, that paid us for our trouble. A Boer farmer, a big hulking fellow, came into the Thomson's farm—they are relatives of one of our chaps—and told Bertha Thomson in a domineering tone to get him some dinner. Now the dinner was over for the day, and Bertha did not relish the way he talked. We chaps, half a dozen of us, were in the other room. I walked into the kitchen where Bertha was, and it was not long before I landed him one on the point of the jaw that knocked him silly for a bit. When

he came to we put him on his horse, gave the animal a cut or two, and sent him on his way a good deal quicker than he had come. What should the fool do but come with a party of his friends the next night to make reprisals. We felt it would not do to use firearms, but we got some good cudgels, and didn't we give those chaps a drubbing? And we laid a complaint with the local authorities with such strength that they were in a bit of a funk, and gave our assailants a regular wiggling. But the "authorities" are just two storekeepers and the local postmaster.

But mark my words, in a year's time there will be trouble. Meanwhile, my dear father, I am coming back home by the next ship, and then I will tell you the reason I left so suddenly. With best love to Aunt Martha and yourself.

Your affectionate and dutiful son,

CECIL.

Lord Arnold passed the letter over to his sister to read.

"What *do* you think of that?" she said. "I wonder what his secret is?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"I CALLED at Ravendale this afternoon to enquire about Lord Arnold," said Squire Faber as he took a cup of tea from his daughter. They were sitting in the handsome drawing-room of Avonhurst, and as an elegant interior it would have pleased the eye of the connoisseur. When Ronald Faber came into possession of Avonhurst he had had the good sense to put the entire decoration and refurnishing into the hands of one of the first London firms. As a consequence, Avonhurst surprised the county people who came to call.

Lord Arnold and his sister had called, so of course even the most exclusive would naturally follow their example. Consequently the silver receptacle for callers' cards held a fair collection of the ceremonious bits of pasteboard of that section of the county.

Constance's eyes brightened with interest at her father's communication. "Oh, did you, father?" she said.

"Yes, and I'm glad to say his lordship is better. For one thing he's had a letter from his son in South Africa."

"Oh, has he? He *would* be glad of that. So would

Lady Martha. Is Mr. Cecil all right?" enquired Constance, as carelessly as she could. But really her hand, that happened to be holding a teacup, trembled as she put it down, so that the cup rattled in its saucer a little. She was angry with herself for such a display of feeling.

"Oh, yes, he's all right. I always said he was. And I've always put my foot down when anybody has ever made any suggestion to the contrary. Mr. Cecil Arnold is a great contrast to that other fellow that was here not long ago."

"You mean Richard Rowerton, father?" said Constance.

"I do. I've no opinion of that young man whatever. When I heard that he, too, had made himself scarce, I felt instinctively that there was something wrong. I knew him as a boy, and I disliked him from the first. He was cruel and cowardly. Then, again, his father spoiled him. Let him have everything he wanted, and was not firm with him. I've often told his dad he was allowing him too much liberty. I'm afraid the old chap is a good deal cut up about him now. However, let us talk about something else."

"Father, I have a confession to make," said the beautiful girl, coming round to the back of her father's chair and putting her hands on his shoulders. He reached up and held one of them.

"Have you, my dear?—nothing very bad, I know. Confess away, my penitent."

"I never told you, father, that the last time Richard Rowerton was here he proposed to me."

"Never!" said her father, "the impudent scoundrel; why, he is not fit to carry your shoes. Confound his impudence. That's just like his cheek."

"Yes; he was very impudent about it, too. He implied that I had given him encouragement—which I'm sure I never had—and he left me with something like a threat."

"I'll threaten him! I wish you had told me, Constance. I would have thrashed the beggar soundly. Propose to my daughter, indeed! He isn't fit to touch your foot, let alone your hand!"

"And he said my refusal of his advances was on account of my thinking so much of Mr. Cecil Arnold. He went away, sneering at me. And I'm sure I've never given anybody any encouragement, nobody in the world."

And the young lady flung herself on her knees and gave way to a passion of tears. Her father comforted her in a fatherly, masculine way and the "good cry" was a relief to her.

"This is too foolish," she said, standing up and mopping her eyes, "I'll go out for a walk in the park. Don't think anything of it, daddy. I shall be all right in a few minutes," she finished, as she left the room.

Ronald Faber's face was a study. He felt as though some strong language would be a relief to

him. But he had trained himself not to give way to swearing, so he merely paced about very forcibly, and occasionally slapped one hand at the other as though he were emphasizing an imaginary punishment.

"Well, of all the ——" (here he pounded the table).

"Confound his ——" (here one fist met the other open hand with a vigor that suggested what Squire Faber would have done if Dick Rowerton had happened to be there).

When he had cooled down a bit he remembered that he had forgotten to mention to Constance that she was invited to accompany him to Ravendale on the following morning, as Lord Arnold had expressed a wish—conveyed through Lady Martha—to see them.

"Don't stand on ceremony, Mr. Faber, drive over in the morning. Arnold will be delighted to see you. He's well enough to receive visitors now." So Lady Martha had spoken. Her opinion of Faber had wonderfully improved of late. She found that instead of being vulgar and ignorant, he was well-mannered and intelligent.

On the following morning, therefore, Squire Faber and his daughter went over to Ravendale. The turnout in which they drove was in every respect up to the mark. The coachman and footman on the box looked the picture of well-trained English servants,

in their neat livery, while the high-stepping horses were as fine a pair as was to be seen on that countryside.

Lord Arnold was delighted to receive them in the morning-room, which looked cheerful and bright. He was in an easy chair, in his dressing gown, and he asked them to excuse his rising. But he he was, he said, making a gradual improvement.

"Of course, Faber, when we get old it takes longer to mend up. Still, I think I'm doing pretty well. The doctor says I must have patience. I don't know whether I shall ever put my leg across a horse again."

"Certainly you will, my lord," said Faber. "I've known many who have had worse tumbles and have got over them all right."

"Ah, we're getting old, Faber, we're getting old. We're not so young as we once were. Not so young as your dear daughter over there, talking to my sister, eh? A fine girl, Faber; I don't wonder you're proud of her. Some of us might think daughters better than sons."

"I'm glad to hear that Mr. Cecil is all right, and is coming home again," said Faber.

"Yes, he's had his bit of adventure, and I think it will do him good. He left suddenly, but, thank heaven, that was the worst part of it. There was nothing for him to be ashamed of. I say, Faber, ——" Lord Arnold looked up and saw that Constance was engaged in lively conversation with

Lady Martha. At that moment the latter rose, and said she was going to take her visitor through the hot-houses. When they were gone his lordship continued:

"Old Rowerton has been to see me twice lately. He was here yesterday morning again. He had begged to be allowed to see me. You see I'm his oldest customer, and a lot of my money has passed through his hands."

"Yes, my lord, I know."

"Of course you do, Faber. I well remember the time when you joined him. Well, the old man's thoroughly broken up. That son of his is a fiend incarnate. The old man is as honest as the day. Now I wouldn't tell everybody, Faber ——"

Lord Arnold lowered his voice.

"But the old man has found out that it was his son who arranged for the doping of Queen. Found it out quite by accident. It was poor Dablish who really did the actual business. Then he killed himself. He was led astray and he felt he couldn't live. When young Rowerton heard of his death he made himself scarce at once. Like these fools always do, he'd left certain papers behind that he'd forgotten to destroy, and the whole business came out. His father's done with him for good and all and came over yesterday to pay me the money I'd lost on Queen."

"Well, I never! What astounding news. But old

man Rowerton was always straight and always will be," said Faber.

"For his sake we must hush the matter up," said Lord Arnold.

"And now I can tell *you* something, Lord Arnold. The last time this infamous rascal was at my house he had the impudence to propose to my daughter."

"Good heavens!" said Lord Arnold, "he had the cheek of the devil himself. Ah, well, he's done for, we shan't be troubled by *him* again."

"When does your lordship expect Mr. Cecil home?" said Faber as they were leaving, Constance and Lady Martha having returned from their tour.

"Well, the boats seem to be a bit awkwardly scheduled. I'm afraid he won't be home for Christmas, though we all wish he could. You see we are very near to Christmas now. Still, he may be here for the New Year."

CHAPTER XX.

"You remember John Sandy, Lord Arnold's head gamekeeper, who left come four years last Michaelmas, don't you Nichol?" questioned Jimmy Wheelbox one evening, as they sat enjoying a smoke in the parlour of the White Horse Inn. For it was Saturday evening, and there was a whole day of rest before them, ere the next work day.

"Sure! Who could forget John," said Nichol

"Well, he's come back. Been in London for over a year, just spent up. He's trying Lovejoy to get him his old job. Tim is leaving, most likely he'll get his place."

"Lord love you! You don't mean to say John's spent up! after all the money he saved. It did not cost him a penny in rent to live in the cottage in the wood. A tidy wage he was getting, four pounds per month, with fowls and taters of his own to live on. Did he spend much in baccy and beer, eh, landlord?"

Yale, who was reading the *Evening Mail*, glanced up, hearing Nichol address him.

"Not much, 'tis the truth."

"Was he lucky in 'orse racing, landlord?"

"If ever a man put his money on the right horse, Sandy did, so help me, Nichol!"

"There, Jimmy, that speaks for itself. He made big wages, spent little, made money in gambling. Now you say he's spent up and trying to get his old job on again. 'Tis a queer world!"

"Queer!" mocked Jimmy, refilling his old clay pipe. "What will you think when I tell you what Sandy tells me! Who do you think he saw in London? None other than young Rowerton, son of the bookmaker. If ever a devil 'as got 'old of any-one, he's got 'old of him, Sandy says."

"Richard Rowerton, Jimmy? I heerd as he'd gone to Ameriky."

"That's a clear bluff. He's living," Jimmy said, puffing vigorously at his clay pipe, "I forget the name of the place, but 'tis a part of the city where drinking and gambling is all the vogue. A hell upon earth, Sandy says. He's an altered man. Drinking himself to death! Not if I'd mind the life, to think on it," Jim added, blinking his eye, "we 'ard working folks would relish such a holiday. There is something in it, though that is all queer, when the son of a rich man like Rowerton goes all to the dogs!"

"What's come over him, anyway?" exclaimed Nichol, shaking the ashes out of his pipe. "Didn't he leave of his own accord! I heerd tell of it. Things like that allus get round, somehow. 'Tis only the way some of these gents spend their holiday, thinks me. The rich enjoy devilry as well as the poor class," he added.

"That may be so, Nichol. Listen what Sandy says. Sandy learnt a little of Rowerton's doings in London from one of his companions. He was a decent sort of chap, Sandy said. He admitted he was not doing as he should do; went to the dogs over some trouble, domestic or something similar, I think he said, said Sandy. This fellow told Sandy, who was enquiring about Rowerton—he is known by another name now; well, he told him that when Rowerton is in one of his bad drinking bouts, 'tis always horses and women he curses. Raves about all sorts of things. Talks a lot about the doping of a racehorse."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the landlord, "I wonder if he had anything to do with doping Queen?"

"That's too light I see it in, landlord."

"I would never have thought of it," exclaimed Nichol, amazed. "Dear me! Bad luck seems to come along with horses in this neighborhood. Here's Lord Arnold laid aside from the injuries he received in the hunting field."

"Come! come! come! It may be only hearsay about Dick Rowerton," said Yale, looking uneasily around. He heard somebody going into the tap-room. "There is no knowing what mischief would be made out of it, if the scandal gets to folks' ears. All folks are not alike. 'Twould be safer, gentlemen, to keep a quiet tongue on the subject. 'Tis

plain to see the scandal has been hushed up. It has not got out in these parts. I've knowed old Mr. Rowerton many a long year, and always found him trustworthy with what bit of business I've done with him. The best we can do is to not mention it, except among ourselves," said Yale, oracularly. He liked to be a bit important.

"There's logic in your advice," said Jimmy. "'Tis a wise man who keeps a silent tongue, eh, landlord," he quoted.

"You may rely on me, landlord, to keep silent. If it is a kindness to keep a silent tongue about Dick Rowerton's misdoings and all that, Dick Nichol would be the last man in the world not to."

"That is wise of you, gentlemen. Now a whiskey and soda would not be amiss! What do you say?"

The landlord spoke hastily. Already the tap-room was filling with customers. Some had grown a little more than impatient with his unusual delay in coming to serve them.

Jim and Dick readily accepted Yale's treat, following him into the bar.

"Yale's had the best of learning," said Jimmy. "I told you so, eh, Dick! What he says is always right. Nevertheless," he added, "'tis a b—— old mess-up young Rowerton has got into, I can tell you."

"It seems so Jimmy. I tell you I would not care to be in his shoes."

Dick's wizened face lit up with an extra light of

intelligence to that it usually wore. He felt that he was getting a little logical and taking his part in the conversation.

Jimmy nodded his head silently. Then the landlord beckoned them to come close up to the bar-counter. He had the glasses filled ready with their toddy.

The crowd grew in size as the evening wore on, and noisier in tongue as they indulged more deeply in liquor. Among them none were more talkative than Dick Nichol and Jimmy Wheelbox, and none more ridiculously solemn in their determination not to say anything about the sordid news they had heard.

"I know summat as you don't," Jimmy would say, going over to a fresh arrival.

"What is it?" the newcomer would say.

"Ah, thatsh my bizness, see. Thatsh my bizness. I speak t'you as one genelman to another, don't I? Very well, then, what I say is I c'd tell you summat as you don' know, see? But I'm not a-goin'-to. Every 'spectabul genelman has things won' talk about."

And so on and so on, with foolish iteration.

* * * * *

On the morning of that very day, Dick Rowerton rose from his bed in the private hotel where he was boarding, in the Bloomsbury district of London, with a sort of dim idea that he would go, like the prodigal son, to his father and ask forgiveness. He was

unaware that his father had discovered his duplicity. The night before Dick had been indulging in intoxicating drink and gambling until the early hours of morning with his companions. Now he felt sick, and his head ached. He must go out for a "pick-me-up," he thought. He paused as he passed the office of the hotel, and asked if there were any letters for him. He was handed one bearing the Liverpool post mark. He went into the lounge, threw himself into a chair, and tore the missive open. As he read it his face grew still paler. It was from his father, enclosing a cheque for £1,000, and telling him never to darken his doors again. The letter was short, stern and determined.

Dick Rowerton's face turned an ashen color as he realised what this meant. But the effect it had on him for the moment was simply to make him rush to the nearest bar and gulp down two brandies and soda in quick succession.

In this bar he met one of his gambling companions of the night before.

"That's it, old chap," he said, "I was just going to have one myself. You'll be with us to-night to have your revenge, eh?"

"No, I think not. I've just had bad news. My governor has cut up rather rough."

"Oh, that's the way of governors all the world over. Don't let that worry you. Drown dull care in the social glass. Here, have one with me."

Strange to say, Dick Rowerton's head became

clearer with these potations. He had so accustomed himself to excess in liquor that this morning drink seemed to put him right. When his boon companion had gone he sat down to think things over.

He had experienced a most remarkable run of bad luck at cards. He had drawn nearly the whole of his private balance at his bankers, and had not more than twenty pounds left.

The result of his cogitations was that he determined to go on with his gambling and recoup himself. He had opened an account at a neighboring branch bank, and he now went there and deposited his father's cheque. He drew out £200 of it in £5 notes. With these in his pocket he strolled aimlessly up Great Russell street in the direction of Tottenham Court road. Arriving at this busy thoroughfare he passed along it for some distance, looking into the shop windows with vacant eyes. At last he came to where a blind man sat on a chair with a large book open upon his knees. A dog was by his side, and tied in front of him was a little can for the reception of coppers from the charitable passers-by. The blind beggar's hands were passing over the raised letters of the page, and as Dick Rowerton paused there, the loud, slow voice of the unfortunate man reached him.

"But—when—he—was—yet—a great way—off—his—father—saw him—and—ran—and—fell—on—his—neck—and—kissed him."

"By Jove, that's different from what my governor has treated me" muttered Dick.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE good ship "Scarborough Castle," bound for Southampton from Cape Town, had weathered the contrary winds of her passage, and was now making good time. Everybody on board felt cheerful, as is always the case at the end of a voyage, no matter how pleasant the voyage has been.

Among those who came up on deck to see the first glimpse of England were Cecil Arnold and two of the Oxford friends who had been out on their rather juvenile escapade to South Africa.

"There's 'the right little, tight little island,' at last, boys," said Cecil.

"Yes. I wish we could have got home for Christmas, though," said one of his friends.

"Well, the captain certainly did his best to make Christmas lively for us. But Christmas on board ship is rather rotten," said another.

"Never mind, we shall be home for New Year's," said his neighbor. "All will be forgotten and forgiven."

Cecil was wearing the same grey suit that he had chosen to wear on the night of his departure from Ravendale.

"What a hideous morning that was, after the dance. It's been like a nightmare on me ever since. I hope my old dad's all right" he said to himself.

The boat train for London was waiting at Southampton, and the friends were soon in the swiftly-moving express that took them through the pleasant English landscape, pleasant even in its wintry garb.

Cecil bade his friends farewell at Waterloo station, and was soon in a cab driving post haste to catch the express at Euston. The familiar London streets were delightful, everything was delightful, for was he not going home? He had had no news of Raven-dale or of Avonhurst since he left. A shade of anxiety passed across his features as he remembered that much might have taken place even during the short time of his absence.

At last he was in the L. and N.W. train bound northwards. All being well he would arrive home soon after dusk. That was some satisfaction to him. He drew his travelling rug around his knees, for the carriage was chilly, and buttoned his overcoat around him. Presently a drowsiness seized him, for he had not slept much on the previous night, and before long he fell into a sound slumber.

He awoke with a start. The train was slowing down. Along the crowded station platform porters shouted. The next moment the train stopped. Cecil folded up his travelling rug, snatched up his hand-

bag and slipped out. He quickly passed through the crowd of people, who were too busy with their own special occupations to notice him, and in another moment he went out into the street. He got into one of the many cabs waiting outside the station, instructing the cabman to drive him to Ravendale Manor. Arriving within a short distance of the lodge gate of Ravendale Park, he ordered the cabman to stop, and paid him, for he meant to walk the rest of the way, and entered a little wicket gate of which he had a key in his pocket. It was hardly a mile to the Manor. He did not want to attract attention, as he would by driving, preferring to quietly gain admittance through the back way.

The shades of night were falling around when he knocked softly at the back door. It was the faithful butler, the very man he hoped to see, who opened the door to him. Recognizing his returned young master, he gave a startled exclamation of joy.

"Now, Lloyd, you see I'm back safe and sound; tell me in a few words what's happened. Here, come into the gunroom," said Cecil, with condensed eagerness.

The man followed him and the door was shut.

"Well, Mr. Cecil, of course you know that his lordship had an accident?"

"Accident? Great Scott! No, I know nothing. What accident?"

"Well, sir, he was thrown, as he was out hunting and broke his leg."

"Great heavens! My poor old dad, is he getting on all right?" said Cecil, seizing Lloyd by the shoulder.

"Yes, sir, he's getting along nicely. Your aunt, Lady Martha, has been here all the time, sir. She's with his lordship now, sir, in the library. He's well enough to come down, sir, though he's had a close call."

"I'll write a note to my aunt and you shall take it in, Lloyd. I'll go into the drawing-room—there's nobody there, is there?"

"No, sir."

Cecil wrote a few words and sent them to Lady Martha. That lady's self-possession was equal to the occasion. She placed the note in her work basket without remark.

Lord Arnold looked up from the book he was reading with a questioning glance. Lady Martha made no sign. Nor did she move for some moments. At last she said:

"I must go and get some more silk for this embroidery."

"Can't you ring for it, dear?" said Lord Arnold.

"Oh, no, it will take too long to explain. I left some in the drawing-room cabinet. I'll soon get it."

So saying, this artful person departed. She did not want to upset her brother by a too sudden meeting with his son.

Lady Martha proceeded to the drawing-room like a ship in full sail.

"My dear auntie" said Cecil, rising as she entered and going impulsively toward her. She threw her arms round him and gave him an affectionate greeting, at the same time saying, "O, you naughty boy! How could you leave us in suspense so long?"

But her happy looks belied her words.

"Well, Cecil I must say that South Africa has done you good. Why, you are as brown as a berry, and I suppose you are as hard as nails."

"Yes, auntie, I'm in pretty good fettle," said her nephew, "but how about father; I'm awfully shocked to hear of his illness."

"Yes, Cecil, it's been a near shave. And his poor horse, too, the Duke, broke his neck, you know."

"Poor old Duke! And father was always so fond of him."

"Your father broke his leg, but I'm afraid that was the least part of his injuries. I don't say much to *him* about it, but I fear it will be a long time before he is himself again."

"And I, his son, away from him, when I ought to have been at home playing a son's part. But, auntie, dear, I was most awfully broken up when I went away. I had had a regular facer, and it knocked me over."

"You mean your losses on Queen in that unfortunate handicap?"

"Queen! nothing of the sort. You don't think

I should have gone away because of the loss of a few hundreds or a few thousands on the turf. Good gracious, auntie, I hope I'm a better sportsman than that."

"Well, I'd be the last to pry into your business, my dear boy. But I must say your conduct seems a little remarkable. But come, we must not neglect your father. I must go and break the news gently to him. Look at your watch, and come into the library in ten minutes."

And Lady Martha sailed out as importantly as she had sailed in, leaving Cecil in a very excited state in the drawing-room.

Mechanically he approached the grand piano, the keyboard of which was open. Several pieces of music lay there. Some of them were of the early Victorian type, evidently Aunt Martha's exercises of her young days. Cecil remembered well her playing them on the occasion of some of her visits. There was "The Battle of Prague," "The March of the Israelites," "The Huntsman's Chorus," and a number of others. Near these lay a music folio. He opened it and found it contained several songs and selections. But what made his heart stop and then give a great leap was to see the name written at the top of each piece—"Constance Faber," in a free but delicate hand. He turned them over. Tosti's "Good-bye," "When Sparrows Build," "O that we Two were Maying," Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words."

He fell into a reverie, forgetting to look at his watch. Then he came to himself with a start, and proceeded slowly to the library.

Lady Martha had fortified her brother with a dose of tonic wine. Then she had gradually broken the news of Cecil's arrival. But she had led him to suppose that her nephew had not yet arrived at the house. Such a knowledgeable and artful old lady she was!

"I think he'll be just about here by now" she said. And as she spoke Cecil entered.

"My dear old dad!" he cried, rushing in and throwing himself on his knees before Lord Arnold in his easy chair.

"O, drop that, Cecil; you aren't exactly a prodigal. Come, stand up, boy, and let's look at you. At any rate you seem to be in the best of health, and you look as natural as possible. Well, you see, here I am, 'a sheer hulk,' like poor Tom Bowling."

"Not so bad as that, father. You must have had a bad fall, though."

"I did, my boy. It gave me a great shaking up."

"Well, I shall leave you two together," said Lady Martha, "I'm going to see about some dinner for Cecil."

"O, don't bother about me, auntie, I'm all right." But she left father and son together.

"Well now, Cecil," said his father, "do you mind telling me why you went away so suddenly in Novem-

ber? It's now within three days of the new year, you know, and that's a long time."

"You got my letter, father?"

"Oh, yes, and I'm jolly glad you gave that rascally Boer a lesson. But you said you had a secret to tell me."

"Can't you guess, father? Didn't you know that I was awfully gone on Constance Faber?"

"Well, I can't say I had not noticed that you rather admired her. But I never dreamt that it had gone to such a length as to lead you to forsake your home."

"Well, sir, it was in this way. On the afternoon before our dance, I had made up my mind to put the matter to the test—in a word, to pop the question."

"The deuce you had!"

"Yes. The state of uncertainty had become too unbearable. When I got to Avonhurst I found that Constance was in the garden. Going there, I met Richard Rowerton, and with a smile on his face he told me that Constance had just accepted him."

"The lying scoundrel!" said Lord Arnold. "Well, let me tell you that Richard Rowerton's gone to the devil."

"You don't say so!" At that particular moment Cecil did not mind where his supposed rival had gone.

"The lying scoundrel!" Lord Arnold said again.

"Faber told me all about that affair. Not only had Miss Faber not accepted him, but she had sent him away with a flea in his ear."

And then his lordship gave his son the full account of the doings that had been going on while Cecil had been away.

Lady Martha had to make strong representations as to his father's state of health and as to the dinner getting cold before she could get him away from the library. The last words that Cecil said were, "I shall ride over to Avonhurst in the morning."

"Well, you have *my* blessing," his father replied.

"What's all this mystery about?" said Lady Martha. And when Cecil had gone, her brother told her. After which she characteristically said:

"So that was the milk in the cocoanut, eh?"

"Tell Cecil to take the chestnut gelding in the morning," said Lord Arnold, when she bade him good-night.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE next morning was a very pleasant one for riding, for though the weather was not yet wintry, there had been a slight frost that just made the air crisp and exhilarating. Cecil was an accomplished rider, and as he felt the chestnut beneath him responding to his rider's mood, his blood raced through his veins. How delightful it was to see again the well-remembered landscape!

It was with a feeling of eagerness at his heart that he came in sight of the gables of Avonhurst Hall. If he had followed his impulse, he would have put his horse to the gallop. But he determined to put the curb on himself, and he arrived at the lodge at the entrance to the drive at a very sober and respectable trot. And that measured pace he kept up till he came to the door of the mansion.

Leaving his horse with one of the gardeners, who said he would take the chestnut to the stables, Cecil rang the bell, with a heart the beats of which were slightly accelerated. A footman came to the door.

"Has Mr. Faber finished breakfast—he's in, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, I think he's in the library. Will you please to come in, sir."

Cecil stepped into the hall, hat and riding-whip in hand, and who should come out of the breakfast-room into the hall at that very moment, but Constance Faber herself!

She was attired in a well-fitting gown, of some light blue material, that was of the exact tint to set off her complexion and hair. And her face was full of surprised interest and warm friendliness.

"Why, Mr. Arnold! The very idea of seeing you. I thought you were thousands of miles away. Come in, father will be delighted."

"Do you mind if I speak a word to you first, Miss Faber? I want to tell you something that I omitted to tell you when I saw you last. Do you remember? It was in the garden—in November."

"Oh, yes. I remember. Well, suppos you come into the drawing-room."

And that wise footman knew enough not to go into the library immediately and announce Cecil's arrival. Instead, he went into the servants' hall and told what he had seen to the upper housemaid, for whom he had a great admiration.

Constance was all in a flutter as she led the way into the drawing-room and perched herself on the highest and most uncomfortable chair in the room.

"Won't you sit down?" she said.

"No. I don't want to sit down. I can do better standing."

"Well, will you put down your hat and whip?—you

might frighten me, you know," she said with a mischievous gleam in her eye.

"I don't think I shall. The last time I saw you, Miss Faber, I came here with the intention of making a proposal of marriage to you."

"To me? Oh, Mr. Arnold!"

"And I was met just as I was going into the garden by Richard Rowerton, who told me that you had just accepted him."

"How awfully wicked of him! Why, I'd just told him I would have nothing to do with him. The wretch!" she said energetically, rising and going to the window.

"Then it wasn't so?"

"Of course it wasn't. Oh, Mr. Arnold, how in the world could you think of such a thing? Then that explains it all. I never could understand how you spoke to me in the cold way you did when we had been such friends. Ice was nothing to it. You were just like the North Pole and the South Pole put together."

"Then I may still ——"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't really. When people can be such icebergs all at once——"

"But I'm not an iceberg."

"Yes, you are."

"Constance," he said, putting his arm round her waist and seizing her hand, "you *know* I'm not."

"Well, I don't care if you are," she said, as she

buried her glowing face on his shoulder. "I think I rather like icebergs."

"You dearest dear," he said, kissing her once, twice, thrice, and crushing her in his strong arms.

Till she said: "I think you are a polar bear, too," and gently but firmly disengaged herself.

"Just look how you've roughed up my hair, you naughty boy, I must run up and put it straight. Go into the library and tell father."

And she ran out of the room.

* * * * *

There was never a more surprised man than Ronald Faber, when Cecil, after knocking, opened the door of the library, where the squire was reading his morning paper. He jumped up and was soon shaking hands, with an utter forgetfulness of that elevation of the elbow and wrist, which he had recently acquired as a polite accomplishment. In fact it might have been a pump-handle he was grasping instead of the hand of a returned friend.

"Well, I am glad to see you, Mr. Cecil!" he said. "It's a bit of all right you getting home for New Year's Day. The old year's nearly done for. Well, I suppose you've got lots of news to tell us."

"I've got a piece of very important news to tell you, Mr. Faber," said Cecil earnestly.

"What? The governor's not taken worse, is he?" said Faber, anxiety depicted on his features.

"No, thank God, my father is getting on pretty well. No, Mr. Faber—the news is this, that I have just proposed to your daughter and she has accepted me. So now we want to ask your blessing."

"Well, I *am* blown," said Faber. The news reached his fatherly heart with a sort of shock that made him lapse into a natural and colloquial expression of surprise. He put out his hand and grasped Cecil's again.

"You'll always be kind to her? She's very dear to me, you know. It's rather dreadful in a way, to lose a daughter, you know."

"Oh, you won't lose her. How could you, she's too loving and affectionate for that."

And just at that moment Constance glided into the room and was soon in her father's arms.

"So now," said Mr. Faber, after a few moments, "there's nothing left but for me to say, as they do on the stage, 'Bless you, my children.'"

And he took Constance's hand and placed it in Cecil's.

The celerity with which it was known in the servants' hall that the Honorable Mr. Cecil Arnold was engaged to Miss Constance Faber, would be surprising to some people. Nor was it long before the news was flashed to the outermost confines of Avonhurst and Ravendale.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUT clouds were to mingle with sunshine, tears with smiles, in the fortunes of Avonhurst and Ravendale.

Frank Yale, the landlord of the White Horse, was, in these days, in his element. There was news of some kind to tell every day, and if not to tell, to talk over and comment upon. For there is no place like a village tavern for chewing the cud, as it were, of everything that happens.

Let nobody who resides in or near a village imagine that his or her concerns are not duly canvassed. Their income, their expenditure, their relationships, their clothes, their horses and carriages, if they have any, and, in fact, everything that is theirs, including their family skeletons in their closets are eagerly and exhaustively discussed.

Yale had no greater confidant than his old crony, Dick Nichol, the cowman at Ravendale. If Dick had only been educated, he would have made a good reporter for a newspaper, for his "nose for news" was well developed and he heard all the gossip of the servants' hall.

For the Avonhurst department, Yale relied on Tom

Warburton, the lodge-keeper, who had been lodge-keeper also in the old days of Squire Hobbs, before Mr. Faber had purchased the Hall. Tom was just as good a gossip as Nichol. The latter heard the kitchen news of Ravendale, when he took the milk to the dairy and had many a talk with the dairymaid. Tom Warburton's lodge was the recognized calling place of all the servants in the Avonhurst establishment.

The three, Yale, Warburton and Dick Nichol, were in the bar parlor on the last night of the year.

"Well, it's been a bad year, I call it," said Dick, "as bad a one as we've had. I'm glad to think as it's agoin'. 'Tis but about three hours and a half to the New Year. Come, landlord, let's have a mug of that old ale of yours. 'Twill perk us up a bit."

"Have one on me," said Warburton, "you paid for the last."

"What do you mean by its being a bad year?" said Yale, as he pulled down one of the handles of his beer engine and filled the foaming mugs, holding the two in his left hand.

"Well, look at the affair of Queen, and the November Handicap. Look at racing—it may be all right as far as you're concerned, landlord, but with we chaps, it's been rotten bad luck. Look at his lordship's accident, and by the way, chaps, there's none of you know how terribly he felt Mr. Cecil's going away that sudden. Look at the suicide of Dr. Dablich. I calls it a dooced bad year."

"Well, there's summat in what you say," said Warburton. "It's been a bad year for me. Take it f'r instance on the question of tips. Now, when Squire 'Obbs was alive, his friends used to come drivin' up, and then I'd run out and open the gate, and the ladies and gents would ask if the fam'ly was up at the 'All, and most gen'ally drop a sixpence or p'raps a shillin' into my 'and. But latually—good night!" And Warburton's shrug of the shoulders and toss of the head expressed a world of meaning.

"Ain't his lordship so well?" enquired Yale. "I heerd a whiaper as he wasn't."

"All I knows is that the doctor come twice yesterday—whereas for the last week or ten days he's only been comin' every other day.

"He got an awful shaking with that fall," said Yale. "A man of that age, you can never exactly tell what may not happen."

"Yes; there may be internal injuries. Outside a man may heal up all right—his broken leg, for instance was a trifle, as accidents in the hunting field go. Why I've had a broken leg myself—you remember, Yale, when I fell off the haystack."

"'Course I do, Dick. Oh, yes, broken legs are nothing out of the way. It's those things what's inside. If there's injury to the 'art, or the stummick, or even the liver. Why d——n my eyes, I've know'd a man to die of a strained liver."

"His liver didn't save his bacon, as you may say,"

said Warburton, who was esteemed the village joker.

"Ha, ha," laughed Yale, "that's one o' your good ones."

"Well, there's one thing that you must confess," he continued, "that couldn't ha' been happier nor better, and that's the engagement of Mr. Cecil to Miss Faber."

"You're right there," said Warburton, "he couldn't ha' got a nicer young lady, and it kinder links our two fam'lies together; here's luck to both of 'em, long life and prosperity."

The three cronies lifted their glasses and drank.

"They said the old lord was awfully broke up when Mr. Cecil went away so sudden," said Warburton.

"Broke up?" said Dick Nichol, "Broke up was no word for it. He was a changed man. For a week or two he went about looking like a judge as was goin' to pass sentence of death on some cove or other. Thinks I to myself, Master Cecil, you've made a bad spec this time. Shouldn't wonder if the old 'un crosses you out of his will. We puts two and two together up at Ravendale," continued Dick, with an inexpressibly knowing wink, "speshully as Lawyer Brown was sent for. One o' the grooms went over in the dog-cart for him—I believe it was the day before his lordship's accident."

Presently one of the workmen of the Ravendale estate came hurriedly in. He had been in great haste

as his flushed face and hard breathing plainly showed. There was a brief silence. The three cronies were quick to notice the solemn features, the awed expression that shone in his eyes. They stared at him agape.

Yale looked eagerly at him. His usually beaming face wore an alarmed expression.

"What's the matter, Holloway?" he said, sharply.

"Lord Arnold is dead!"

He spoke in a faint and husky voice. He was evidently deeply affected.

"Dead? dead?" they cried.

"Here what's this?" said a man who at that moment came in from the tap room, where half a dozen men were drinking.

"Lord Arnold is dead," said Yale. The man went back to the tap room and silence immediately succeeded the previous rumble of conversation.

"Tell me when he died, Holloway?" asked Yale, when the noise subsided.

"This evening at eight o'clock," replied the man with a quiver in his voice.

Yale looked across the room and through the open door of the tap room at which its occupants were now assembled with a look of enquiry on their faces. Then he filled a glass with ale, and slowly raised it.

"Lord Arnold is dead. Long live Lord Arnold," he said.

"And so say I," said Dick Nichol, his eyes full of

tears, for he had a good heart. "Poor old gentleman. He wor a good master, and so I hopes Mr. Cecil 'll be. But he wor a good 'un. One o' the real old sort. No nonsense about him. What he said he stuck to. Well, didn't I say it wor a bad year? A dooced bad year I say, and this the last hours of it."

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was ten o'clock in the morning of the third day after Lord Arnold's death. A chill December wind, drifting before it a fine drizzle of rain, that later in the day turned to snow, added discomfort to the mournful throng of people, men, women and children who were gathering towards Ravendale Manor graveyard, to see the remains of their beloved Lord of the Manor lowered into the family vault.

Through the quiet streets of Avonhurst wound the long row of carriages behind the hearse in slow procession, towards the place of tombs. All business places and shops were closed. The blinds of private houses along the route were drawn. Along the gravel drive-way through the cemetery on either side, bare-headed, stood the laborers of the Ravendale Manor estate, while the funeral procession slowly passed. Of the crowd of mourners, from peasants to landed gentry, none came out of curiosity's sake, all sincerely mourned the departed. No better testimony of their esteem could be given than the expression of their faces.

As the rector in quivering tones read the burial service a robin flew off a holly-bush close by and

settled for a moment by the coffin. Only for a second he lighted there and was back to the tree, filling the solemn air with low melodies. The fierce wind that had risen at the break of day now moaned fitfully through the clump of high evergreen trees, then gradually ceased and died down, while the falling snow fell thickly, covering the ground with its soft white mantle.

"Dust to dust, ashes to ashes," solemnly said the rector, while the coffin, white with the falling snow, was lowered into the ancient family vault, where lay the remains of many long dead ancestors.

The service ended, the mourners mechanically turned and passed out of the cemetery. As the new Lord Arnold drove homewards, accompanied by his aunt, many turned and looked sympathetically towards him. "May he be as good a man as his good father was," was the universal feeling, if it had been put into words, as the carriage and pair slowly passed them.

"That's the end of Lord Arnold," said Jim Wheelbox. "Now they'll go up to the Hall and read the will. Well, well, we'll see what we'll see," he added in a whisper, as they stood by the great iron gates of Ravendale Park, that were thrown wide open to let the carriages pass up to the Manor.

Amongst the many, who were invited to the funeral, Squire Faber occupied an important place. His carriage, drawn by a handsome pair of black

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mares, was third in the long procession. Constance, in deep black, accompanied her father. Jim Wheelbox, who had all eyes upon her, turned and threw a sideways wink at Nichol. "'Tis our future landlady!" he whispered. "God bless her!" Nichol answered fervently, "May it be so!"

A policeman who stood by one of the massive pillars of the gateway, beckoned them to move on. They joined the crowd of sightseers who had gathered and who were now strolling away.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. JOHN BROWN, senior partner of Brown and Brown, solicitors, was chewing the stump end of a cigar he had been previously smoking while he sat, or rather lounged, in a chair in his private office. Before him, on a desk, lay a copy of the last will and testament of Lord Arnold of Ravendale. The lawyer's face was a study. His brow was deeply contracted as his stern, eagle-like eyes glanced over the duplicate copy of the will that he had read aloud the day before to those whom it concerned.

The will was a sane one, with the exception of a codicil inserted recently, that seemed to Lawyer Brown's mind very unfair, or rather peculiar. Legacies were left to various charities, relatives and dependents, but after leaving the whole of the remainder of the estate, real and personal, to his beloved son, Cecil, this clause read: "On condition that my said son marries within a year's time and enters and runs my mare Queen in the Manchester November Handicap; otherwise the whole of my estate goes to my beloved sister, Lady Martha Arnold."

Lawyer Brown threw the cigar stump into the grate.

"Humph!" he grunted, folding the parchment. "A very unnatural codicil," he added, "very unnatural. He must have been off his balance. I told him so when he made it. Of course it was done when his son went away so suddenly."

He rose, unlocked the safe and placed the copy in the box labelled "Arnold."

"He never thought he would be taken so suddenly or he would have altered this," he mused, sitting down by his desk and carefully choosing a pen from a number of assorted ones that lay in the tray.

He glanced at the calendar, as if giving the oddity of the will a little more consideration. "Humph! time alone will decide to whom the property goes," he grunted.

Lawyer Brown was very far from romantic. He was a big man physically, and in his large breast beat a large heart. The latter, his heart, at times got the better of his judgment; which, for a lawyer, did not always pay. Unlike, perhaps a majority of his profession, he was a man of high ideals and unflinching truthfulness. He was at his best when working in a case to uphold the weak and forlorn side against the tyrannical. A personal friend of the late Lord Arnold's, he rather despised horse-racing, and perhaps detecting this, sporting subjects had been generally tabooed in their conversation.

He was now deeply absorbed on a particularly interesting case that he had been working upon for

some time. Several weeks it had been before the law courts, but without any more satisfactory result as to a finish than when it first saw the light of day. Strewn before him lay sheet upon sheet of foolscap paper. Thereon were notes which he was carefully preparing. They presented problems which were hard to solve. In the adjoining room his stenographers were rattling off copy with typewriters; the steady click, click of their machines was the only sound to break the stillness.

Ten o'clock was chiming simultaneously by the city clocks over the city, when there came a vigorous rat-tat on the office front door. Lawyer Brown glanced out of the window. He heard the rap and only a minute before he thought he had heard a carriage stop. He now saw that a carriage and pair were waiting outside. Then a knock came on the door of his private office.

"Come in," immediately cried Brown.

The door opened. It was Lady Martha Arnold, ushered in by the head clerk.

Brown rose.

"Take a seat, Lady Martha," he exclaimed, with a bow, handing her a chair.

She was dressed in deep black. She raised the veil that covered her face.

Lawyer Brown, in his office, was a different man from what he was when away from business. If Lady Martha had called at his house, or he with his wife

had been visiting Ravendale Manor, he would have naturally shaken hands when asking politely after her health. But when any one called to see him at his office, even if it were his most intimate friend, they beheld a much more reserved man, as if his nature altered completely during business hours.

For a time there was silence. Lawyer Brown took his gold-rimmed spectacles from off his nose and commenced rubbing the glasses with his pocket handkerchief.

"I have called, Mr. Brown," Lady Martha said in a rather uncertain voice, "about—about my late brother's will." Her eyes had filled with tears, and a sob had risen to her throat.

"I quite understand, I quite understand, Lady Martha," sympathetically said Brown.

"I want, Mr. Brown, to alter my will; to leave the whole of my estate to my beloved nephew, Cecil Arnold."

"Very natural, very natural, Lady Martha. I can quite understand your feelings as regards—as regards the extraordinary codicil in the late Lord Arnold's will. Very natural, Lady Martha."

"I am sure it is only as my beloved brother would have wished it, Mr. Brown. He felt Cecil's departure very keenly, and it was in his wrath that he added that codicil. Then, poor man, he forgot it. You should have seen him and Cecil together after Cecil returned!"

Then Lady Martha told the lawyer the story.

"How shocking ! What a scapegrace that Young Rowerton must be !" exclaimed Brown. "And otherwise, Lady Martha, I suppose you feel a little doubt as to whether your nephew would be willing to carry out the conditions of the codicil?"

"I did not say so, Mr. Brown. I only surmise. Of course, the marrying part of the business is clear enough."

"Just so. Then, according to your will, as you wish me to alter it, the property goes to Cecil on your demise?"

"Yes."

"Still, if your nephew carries out your late brother's instructions he is entitled to the Ravendale estate anyhow."

"Yes."

"I will make the necessary alterations, and will show you a draft of them within a few days. I think the new Lord Arnold is a very lucky young man. I hope he is enjoying good health?"

"Oh, yes, he's all right. Why shouldn't he be with a girl like Constance Faber to comfort him."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Our story comes to a close with another visit to the White Horse Inn, a hostelry with which we have become well acquainted in the course of these simple annals.

The springtime had come round again and crocuses and tulips made the gardens gay. Frank Yale, the landlord of the tavern, had a nice little plot at the rear of his house.

"Things seem to be turning out pretty well at Ravendale," said Yale to Dick Nichol as they went along the garden walk.

"Yes, but what beats me," said Dick, "is that they are going to sell all the race-horses." He was thumbing a newspaper between his grimy fingers. Under a heading that read in bold type, "Sale of Lord Arnold's thoroughbreds," was a lengthy account giving in minute detail the coming sale of Lord Arnold's famous racing stable. "That's a death-blow to racing," Nichol grunted, despairingly.

"Don't take it so badly, Nichol," said Jimmy Wheelbox, who now joined them.

"Lord love you!" said Dick. "What's come over Jimmy! The first man I would 'ad expected to 'ave

cursed; and 'ad right to 'ave cursed savagely, coolly says, 'don't take it so badly, Nichol.' Man alive, Jimmy, cannot you see 'tis a deathblow to our racing! 'Asn't the Arnolds kept race-'orses for generation unto generations! Bah! is this queer world turning topsy-turvy?"

Frank burst out laughing at Nichol's long speech, while Jim, quite serene, coolly puffed at his old clay.

"Are ye mute, Jim?" said Nichol, in loud tones.

"I am not aware of the fact, friend Nichol. Neither do I see why I should be cursing o'er the loss of our local race-'orses. I am proud to say I'm as keen a sport as ever. To prove it, my friend, I'll take a wager with you, Frank can hold the stake, any amount ye like, from one shilling up to a pound, and give ye two to one on to it, that our new Lord Cecil Arnold, will be a wedded man within a year."

"What are you giving us?" said Dick Nichol scornfully, "There ain't much of a risk in that. Everybody knows that in all likeliwoods he will be. It's that among other things that has brought this thing about. Dick Nichol has not been cowman come this twenty years for Lord Arnold, without knowing what's going on at Ravendale Manor!"

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed the landlord, "I think a good glass of ale around would kind of liven up things a bit. Come into the bar parlor. Though it is springtime it's a bit cold. But it does no good to croak! I shall propose the health of our new Lord of the Manor and his lady to be."

They moved in from the garden to the parlor.

"I drink the toast heartily, landlord," exclaimed Jim.

"Same, landlord. I never 'ave the mind to refuse a good thing. That's Nichol."

"Now, gentlemen," spoke the landlord, "as to this 'ere sale of the racing stables, we might squabble all night over the why and the why-for and never come to any correct solution of the problem. I think I can enlighten you on the subject and I don't think you will be going far wrong to take it from me as gospel truth. For who should know better than Mr. Lovejoy, the why and the why-for? Believe me it was through him how I got to know the secret of the new Master of Ravendale. Let me first express my feelings with our friend, Dick Nichol. It is, sir, a sad blow to the racing public in general, a blow that lowers the honor and pride of Avonhurst to a degree in having the finest horse-blood of Merry England sold and transported to God only knows what part of the kingdom!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted Nichol, as Jim loudly beat a tattoo on the floor with his feet—a no mean noise.

"Now, gentlemen, when you have finished, I will proceed," shouted the landlord.

"Go on! go on!" yelled Jim.

"Well, gentlemen," he continued when silence reigned, "It's a very simple matter. Our new Lord

of the Manor has most probably come to the conclusion that his family have for the present had enough to do with race-horses and racing. The old lord never got over the doping of Queen. He didn't show it, but it was a trouble that worked on his constitution all the stronger from the fact that it was concealed. Then came his accident in the hunting field, which would not ha' finished him as it did if his constitution had been in its ordinary shape. Then comes that suicide of Doc. Dablish, who was in a manner connected with the family, having been their vet. as long as he'd been in practice. And it is whispered that Dick Rowerton—also belonging to a firm with which the family has always dealt, was mixed up in some way with the Queen affair. Finally, gentlemen, remember that our new Lord Arnold is engaged to be married to a lady whose father has chucked up all connected with racing, and wouldn't touch it with a pair of tongs."

"You're quite a speaker, Yale, you should put up for parlyment," said Jimmy Wheelbox.

"None o' your chaff, Jimmy. What I say is that all these things being considered, it was always likely that a young nobleman like Lord Cecil should determine to cut racing out altogether. That's the why and the why-for of it, gentlemen. And to show as I means what I say I'm going to give you the opperchunity of drinking the health of the couple in a liquid you ain't much accustomed to.

Frank Yale went down to his cellar and presently came up from thence with a bottle of champagne. Having cut the wires and popped the cork, he filled three old-fashioned glasses.

"Gentlemen," he said, "now we will drink champagne to the health of Lord Arnold and his future wife, wishing them both a long life and happy one."

They rose, the glasses, brimful with sparkling champagne, met in the air with a merry tinkle.

"Long live Lord Arnold and long live his wife," they cried. And Yale to make everything complete, started the time-worn melody, "For he's a jolly good fellow." And so lustily did they sing it that the little rector, who happened to be passing, put in his head to see what it was all about. There was enough champagne left to fill a glass for him, and he speedily joined in the chorus with a rich bass voice that made a very musical accompaniment to the voices of the others.

THE END.

